

# Grey Wethers

V. Sackville-West



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**GREY WETHERS**

*By* V. SACKVILLE-WEST

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GREY WETHERS

THE HEIR AND OTHER STORIES

CHALLENGE

HERITAGE

KNOLE AND THE SACKVILLES

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*New York:*

*George H. Doran Company*

# GREY WETHERS

*A Romantic Novel*

BY

V. SACKVILLE-WEST

NEW



YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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GREY WETHERS. II

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## CLAIRE

*Ces fantômes charmants que nous croyons à nous . . .*

*Ils sont là, près de nous, jouant sur notre route;*

*Ils ne dédaignent pas notre soleil obscur,*

*Et derrière eux, et sans que leur candeur s'en doute,*

*Leurs ailes font parfois de l'ombre sur le mur.*

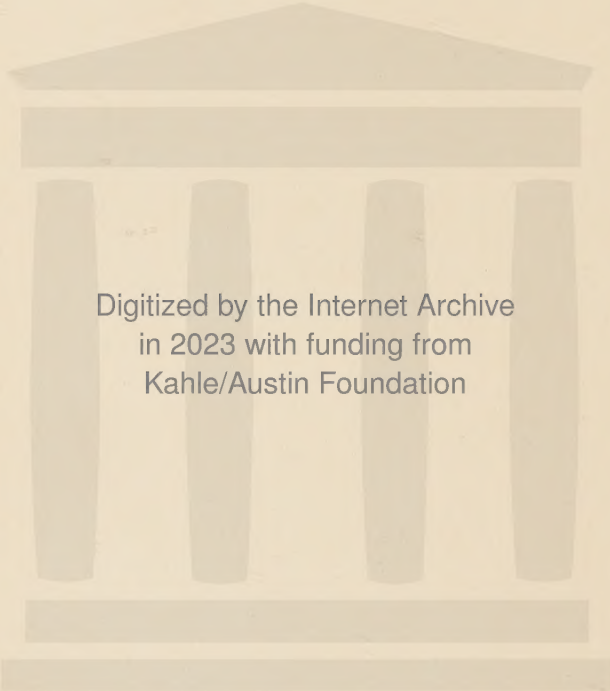
*Ils ont ce grand dégoût mystérieux de l'âme*

*Pour notre chair coupable et pour notre destin;*

*Ils ont, êtres rêveurs qu'un autre azur réclame,*

*Je ne sais quelle soif de mourir le matin.*

VICTOR HUGO.



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# GREY WETHERS

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## PART ONE





# GREY WETHERS

## *Part One*

**M**ORE than half a century has now elapsed since the events which added a new legend to the hard ancient hills lying about Marlborough and King's Avon. The last organised rustic Scouring of the White Horse of King's Avon,—from which occasion these events may properly be said to date, although a believer in predestination might be found to contend that they dated, indeed, from the very births of Clare Warrener and Nicholas Lovel,—that last organised Scouring took place more than half a century ago. The White Horse remains, the same gaunt, hoary relic; King's Avon remains, secluded, tragic, rearing its great stones within the circle of its strange earthwork; the Downs remain, and every winter, now as then, shroud their secrets and the memory of their secrets beneath the same mantle of snow away from the speculation of the curious. But of Clare Warrener and Nicholas Lovel no trace remains, unless indeed they have passed into the wind and become incorporate with the intractable spaces and uncompro-

missing heights. A great many tales are locally told of them, all too fantastic to be set down in print; the chalky soil, so unpropitious to other crops, grew at least a rich crop of superstition, especially in an age and district when stories of witches and burnings were curiously mingled in the minds of the ignorant with the opening of barrows and the fable of British princes. So it is not surprising that the disappearance of these two persons should have given rise to a jabber of conjecture which rapidly came to be explained away by a variety of legends following the line of approved local tradition. It is not the business of print to enter into these conjectures or their interpretation. It is the business of print to set down, in as practical a manner as may be, the circumstances leading up to the final catastrophe,—or fulfilment, call it which you will, according to the point of view from which you approach it,—and to leave the reader to carry on the narrative for himself in the manner best suited to his own fancy and requirements.

A peculiar silence reigned over the village; no children shouted, and no young men or girls passed down the street with that exact air of energy and enterprise that youth alone can produce. Somnolence predominated; it seemed a village inhabited only by the aged, and by those sparsely; a small gaggle of geese quacked and pried with their flat beaks along the cobbles; but for them, the cats and the old men had the place

to themselves. The cats slumbered, curled round in the corners of doorsteps, where the sun struck hot on the stone; and on a bench outside the Waggon of Hay the four old men sat in a row, leaning on their knobby sticks, and holding pewter mugs in their hands. Brown old men, brown of hide and brown of garment, so that it was difficult to tell where their clothes began or their hands and faces left off. Eight boots of similar pattern set squarely side by side on the stones; four heads of almost equal similarity nodded together over the pewter, sagely and immemorially, for it would be safe to say that those four old men of King's Avon might have been at any moment replaced by another set of four old men out of another century, without a casual observer remarking on the difference. It was the day out of half a score of years when they were left in supreme sovereignty over the village. The Waggon of Hay became then what they considered it always ought to be, and what they chose to maintain it had been at that epoch of time called "when we were young," a place of meeting sober and stagnant, undisturbed by the rude, hobnailed entrance of young men, calling for spirits in a tap-room where they should have been content with beer or cider. It was the day when they might sit at peace in their row on the bench, sure that no lout of a blunderer would stumble over their toes. It was the day when they might indulge themselves to their hearts' content in gossip and politics, uninterrupted by the revolu-

tionary opinions of their juniors. They could go back to the time when no railway disfigured the valley of the Frome, when the old horned breed of true Wiltshire sheep wandered upon the heights, and when no man dreamt of threshing his wheat save by flail, or of crushing his apples in any but a wooden press. They could recall without effort those days in the 'thirties, when, themselves but little older than the century, they had gone in bands with rude weapons to break up the new and hateful machinery in the farmers' barns. They could tell again the tales of superstition, and the sights which their fathers' generation had seen; and above all, most succulently, they could recall how old Mother Lovel had been burnt on the top of Silbury Hill for a witch, the bogey their mothers had used to frighten them with; and, nodding together, the four heads coming closer, whisper that Nicholas Lovel had all the black arts at his disposal, and had in a fit of rage put a curse upon his own brother, so that the lad no longer had his wits about him, but loitered around, the anxiety and disgrace of the village.

They had the whole day to themselves, in which to say over and over again the things they had said many times before, and, greedy, would have liked to have the evening too, but far from it, the evening of that day was worse than any other evening, for the young men returned, already uproarious and in their numbers, full of song and boastfulness, their boots white with the



chalk of the Downs, and their broad hats stuck round with the grasses and sorrel that grew up there on those unfertile heights. The old men would collect together in a corner, remotely grumbling, watching the young men as they lounged against the bar, filling the tap-room with their ribald good-humour and their tobacco smoke. The old men disapproved of the young because they feared in them the jostle of the oncoming generation, but the young men merely laughed carelessly at the old, having from them no longer anything to fear. The young men, on the evening of that particular day, would be more than usually vainglorious, bragging of their exploits, growing with every glass more direct in their modes of expression and more hilarious in their laughter. It was the day when all prudery was thrown aside, when each girl must look after herself as best she could or would, when from the earliest hour of exodus from the village along the road to the Downs the band of youths and girls fell into two primitive groups of hunter and quarry, a scramble of catch-who-catch-can, an escapade of wholesome license over the slopes of the Downs. It is true that they started out armed with trowels and rakes, but even these implements of homely design were soon garlanded with vetch and campion torn from the hedgerows as the party went along, nor were these, the ostensible justification of the expedition, the true weapons of the day; the true weapons were the muslin

frocks, the black shoes and white stockings, the ribbons, the sunbonnets, and the eyes and curls beneath the sunbonnets; and the leather leggings of the young men, their strong brown hands, their belted smocks, their insolent air. Impossible that a few wounds should not result from the marshalling of such an armoury. And while the girls on their return must needs carry away to their bedrooms the secrets of the day, evading the inquisitive eye of their mothers, who, not condescending to ask, although burning to know, remembered with a sigh similar feasts of their own youth, the young men might gather in the tap-room and between hints and guffaws convey to all who cared to hear that they were fine young men worthy of their sex and of a sound country tradition. It was perhaps from an unacknowledged flicker of envy that the old men frowned upon their honest coarseness, for occasionally one of them, forgetting his attitude of rebuke, would let out a cackle of enjoyment and appreciation, much to his own dismay, and much to the amusement of the youths, who would cry, "Hey, gaffer, don't you wish you'd be with us? Don't you, you old dog?"

But until this lusty return filled the tap-room with its uproar, the cats and the ancients of the village were left undisturbed. Both in their several ways made the most of their opportunity, the cats to sleep, since little boys who threw stones had gone with the party, hangers-on and peeping-Toms of the day, and the ancients to

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utter their sage words, to echo approval of one another, and to bury their faces deep in the pewter mugs, from which they emerged with beards dripping foam. A suck of the lips, a wipe with the back of the hand, a long "A-ah," of contentment, and the mumble of anecdote flowed again upon its course. Sitting there in the sun was favourable to such occupations. Since the strenuousness of life's work was over,—the early winter rising, the trudges after a lost ewe across snow-swept Downs, the unearthing of mangolds from the frosted ridge, the hours of scything swathe by swathe under burning midday,—what could remain better to do than to sit upon a bench in the sun, with companions who in colour and outlook were the very spit of oneself, to grumble against new-fangled notions, and to wet one's gizzard with a long pull of ale, which, at all events, however ignominious to admit it, had not deteriorated in quality since one's youth?

Amongst the four old men, he who carried perhaps most authority, if any difference could be said to exist amongst the ancient cronies, was John Sparrow, who out-topped them by a year or so of age. Not that this fact in itself constituted so marked a superiority; it placed the senior rather at a disadvantage, since there existed amongst the four a tacit competition as to which should outlive the other, and each within his own mind dwelt upon the day when a fresh mound should be turned in the neighbouring

church-yard, and a shrunken row of three should sit upon the bench, and the new topic, surprising by virtue of its very novelty, be introduced among them, the topic of their missing member. Each probably knew his companions well enough to hope for little charity at their hands. It would be fine fun, to have John Sparrow, or Caleb Patch, or Timothy Cutbush, or Eli Shepard, lying there silent and unable to protest, to pick to pieces at their leisure. No, the few additional years of John Sparrow were not precisely the reason of his weight of word. But Sparrow's daughter Martha, called "my gal," although she would never again see sixty, was servant at the Manor House, where lived the only gentry of the village, and consequently whenever Sparrow began his phrase, "My gal says," his utterance was awaited with a certain degree of respect. The village was proud of its gentry; Mr. Warrener was a scholard, and Miss Clare a lady. Although she went everywhere alone, and rode her pony like a boy, her lady-likeness could never be in question. Hence it came about that John Sparrow's quotations from Martha held a little flavour of high life, a very remote echo of fashion; nothing more vicarious could well be imagined, but to the fuddled minds of the other three it sufficed: John Sparrow was in touch with elegance. He did not much look like it, as he sat at the end of the row on the bench, the colour of a hayseed, having now deposited his empty mug on the bench beside him



and drawn from his pocket a long clay pipe whose small bowl he was very carefully ramming with tobacco. His daughter Martha was altogether a different question; she wore a lilac print dress and an apron over it; her grey hair was partly covered by a cap; she had a sedate manner and shining old cheeks; she was clean and respectful. She had entirely ceased to live at her father's house, having her own bare but immaculate attic bedroom at the Manor House, and periodically she allowed her father to come there to tea in the kitchen, where he sat very neat and intimidated and impressed, enjoying most that part of his visit when he was boasting about it to his cronies afterwards. Being without subtlety they betrayed every corner of their envy and curiosity, to which John Sparrow was not loth to pander. They had had a table-cloth, and cups and saucers—china, not tin—and Martha had put flowers on the table. After tea Martha had played the musical box, but in the garden he had heard Miss Clare laughing as she strolled up and down with her father. That young lady was getting to a marriageable age; and here John Sparrow's recital, which began with veracity, was apt to go astray. He would make a feeble attempt to convey a sense of his privity to secret counsels by pursing up his lips, nodding his head, spreading out his hands, and suchlike indications, without actually committing himself to the indiscretion of words; but presently under the fire of questions, the "Come now,

John, out with it," and the final shaft of scepticism to the effect that he knew no more than they did themselves, he would invariably be led into confidences which had no bearing whatsoever upon the truth. Martha had whispered this, Martha had told him that, Miss Clare, he doubted, was not in truth the daughter of Mr. Warrener; or, if so be she was his daughter, then no daughter that he ought to own to, but rather should pass her off as his niece or his ward. . . . The other three accepted all such statements round-eyed, and the more they gaped the more inventive he grew. Their credulity was his undoing.

And as they drowsed and maundered, they saw Miss Clare emerge presently from the gates of the Manor House, with their glimpse of garden, lawn, and cedars, riding astride upon her pony, whose little hoofs came slipping and shambling over the cobbles, down the street, past the old men, and took the road out towards the Downs. The old men raised their heads at all this little clatter, and a greeting passed between them and Miss Clare; they touched their hats, she waved her whip to them and called out something which they were too deaf to catch, but to which they responded with the "Ay, ay" and the gesture of tolerant encouragement accorded by age towards popular youth. There was a mumble amongst them after she had passed, of unspecified vague approval, before the straggly old beards drooped again upon the

chests, and the street resumed the quiet broken by that small disturbance.

It was not a very great wonder that the village should look upon its gentry as so exclusively its own. Its situation was such, that everything which took place within its enclosure was peculiarly focussed and self-contained. In the first place, it was isolated far from other villages, at the foot of the Downs, which loomed over it on three sides like a huge natural rampart, and in the second place it was entirely surrounded by an ancient earthwork in a complete and perfect circle. This earthwork was broken only at two points, to allow the road to enter the circle, and to leave it again on the opposite side. Within this little enclosed ring of thirty acres lay the village, complete with church, Manor House, and village street, incapable of expansion in any direction, unless it overflowed its boundary, which it had never done. A few out-lying farms at a little distance were included, properly speaking, in the parish, but they were either too remote or too well screened by voluminous trees to distract the eye from the compact symmetry of the little town within the circle. Strangers to the country, coming unawares upon this singular encampment, were at first amazed; but presently there crept into their minds the sense that the whole country traversed by them had been, in a way, but the natural preparation to precisely such a mysterious and secluded patch

of human habitation. They recalled the straight white road driven across the Downs; the pits of poor blanched chalk; the shaven clumps of beech, like giant ricks, upon the skyline; mounds and barrows; the perfect cone of Silbury Hill, which, rooted in its greater antiquity, had forced the Roman road to deflect from its course; the loneliness of the magnificent Downs; the primitive shapes surviving in the White Horses cut as landmarks upon their flanks. Above all they would recall those strange monuments of English paganism, the sarsen stones, hewn by Nature and transported by man to be the instruments of his superstition, left where they had fallen, singly or in rings, obscure in a fold of the Downs, or reared to accord with the eternal procession of the heavens in the gaunt majesty of Stonehenge.

The stranger would recall these stones as he followed the road through the gap into the circle of King's Avon, for there in an ordinary field to the right of the road, just within the embankment, he would see, standing upright to the height of ten or twelve feet, a number of these stones, standing there with such apparent fixity and permanence that it was disconcerting to observe, on a closer inspection, an equal number of the stones fallen flat and half-buried in the ground. Their impressiveness grew, as the beholder began to realise from their symmetrical disposition that what he was considering was no less than the ruins of a temple. The village

lay just beyond the field, and in the rough ground, near the field,—partly ditch below the embankment, partly undergrowth,—many more of the stones might be discovered, half-hidden by dead leaves and mosses, or even by tins and rubbish, and in one or two cases made prisoner, like some inarticulate Laocoon, by the serpentine roots of a beech overhanging the scarp. And as the stranger, after poking about among this tangle, proceeded along the lane towards the village, he would come upon other isolated stones, either embedded in the bank below the hedge, or used as a gate-post into a paddock, standing there patiently enough, towering above the gate and above the hedge, indifferent to the fate that had come upon it; and one, by the roadside, had been made to do duty as a milestone, and bore upon its face the distances to Bath and Marlborough in eighteen eighteenth-century script and Roman numerals. But, although the stones were now thus scattered and even totally removed for purposes of quarrying material, a patient observer might still piece together the design and dimension of the temple, standing once like Stonehenge in rings, when no human dwellings were there, in, as it were, a cup of the Downs, open to sun and rain. But this imaginary stranger would probably dwell rather upon the relationship between the stones of King's Avon, and the stars that they had known unaltered, and the barrows humped upon the Downs, and the roughly-hewn flints turned up

by the plough, the bones and antlers, and the stray tokens left, with very little fame, about the country, silent and enduring while religions perhaps slightly more enlightened because more charitable passed with the ages above their surfaces.

This paganism of England, he might have reflected as he made his way slowly from stone to stone, pausing before each and finding in each the same monotonous and uncommunicative austerity, this early English paganism, how bleakly different it was from the paganism of the South! Indeed, he might wonder whether to call his forebear pagan, which had a rich full-blooded sound, or, stripping him of garlands, to call him simply heathen. Here, in this flint country of the small northern island, no flowers and fruit had surrounded the sacrifice, no cymbals clashed, no grapes and plaited maize wreathed the horns of the victim, no songs accompanied the priest. A stone, a knife, and blood, red and grey, sufficed their ritual. This was no country to see nymphs in the streams and oaks, to hear the flute of a satyr in the beechwood. Yet there was a harsher dignity, beside which the Southern paganism was soft and ample, over-ripe with sweetness. It was a creed which would not concern itself with the fruits of earth; Demeter was not for it, nor lecherous Pan, nor a god clothed in the plumes of a swan. It would concern itself with nothing lower than the most majestic of human contemplations, the sun and the stars in



their courses, so that after the lapse of centuries the upright stones still aspired to celestial communion when the gentle or the angry dawn broke over the rounded Atlantean shoulders of the Downs.

Clare Warrener rode idly along the leafy lane, her pony's hoofs raising little grey puffs of dust. Nothing in particular occupied her mind, beyond the sight which she was going to see, and which for weeks now she had been anticipating. She had promised herself that she would ride on this day up on to the Downs, cast her eye over the festivity, and ride on again, with perhaps a slight resentment at this invasion of the hills; a resentment she knew to be absurd, since the rustic youths and girls at their celebrating had a better right to the hills than she had herself, they who were the descendants of shepherds and farmers, wresting for centuries a living from the poor stony soil. She loved in the hills their spaciousness, and their refusal to yield to tillage; at most they would grant pasture to the sheep crawling on their slopes, but for the rest they remained eternally, in the heart of an amenable and complacent island, the untamed spot—they, and the moorlands, and the hills of Wales and the North.

The shady lane which she had been following soon ceased to be bordered by trees and took an upward direction leading to the foot of the Downs. It became a steep white road mounting straight up the unboundaried slopes, with high

banks on either side, and the winter rain-runnels marked in little zig-zagging ruts and pebbles. Some clumps of furze and a few thorn-trees grew on the lower reaches, but presently even these ceased, and the short turf was the only vegetation. Up here the air was pure and sharp; the grasses waved as they were blown by the breeze; in some places fires had left their blackened patches; a trail of smoke-coloured sheep moved cropping in the dip of a valley. Larks rose continually, soaring straight up into the air, impelled either by some impulse of their own or else disturbed by the sound of the pony's passage. Clare rode with loose reins, letting the pony pick his own way among the pebbles. The road began to wind; it curved round a shoulder of hill, dipped into a hollow, rose steeply again, and all the time its direction was hidden round the next corner. At moments it reached a high point of vantage, whence Clare, looking down in the direction she had come, could see the low fertile lands, the farms, and the clump of trees pierced by the church-spire which was King's Avon. But to north, east, and west, nothing but Downs, the great back of the south of England. She rode on. The pony climbed, his head down, his withers high. She felt the muscles of his flank moving warm beneath her leg; he climbed, strong and willing, and she put him at short cuts which entailed mounting an almost perpendicular slope of grass, for the pleasure of feeling him buckle to the effort.

Presently she heard voices and laughter borne to her on the wind. Before long she reached a kind of plateau of grass, the highest point of all, which commanded a wide view of both Downs and the chessboard landscape far below, crossed by the white roads like streamers from a May-pole; and at the further end of this plateau she saw scattered in pairs over the grass, and assembled at one point as a nucleus from which these couples had detached themselves, the youth of the village of King's Avon in holiday clothes with wild flowers strung about them. She reined in her pony, not liking to interrupt their fun by drawing too near or seeming to admire them as a curiosity. She could recognise most of them at that distance; she picked out the red head of Daisy Morland, the long limbs of Peter Gorwyn, the sunbonnet of Phoebe Patch, the silly laugh of young Baskett, the straw-coloured shock of hair belonging to Job Lackland, the black strap-shoes and white stockings of Annabel Blagdon, who was the belle of the village, and, finally, prowling on the outskirts rather like a pariah dog, the indefinably misshapen form of Olver Lovel. Near by the group were set down the wicker baskets in which they had brought their meal, also the trowels, spades, turf-cutters, and hoes, apparently forgotten. The occasion of the expedition was rendered completely invisible by the sprawling of the persons seated upon it. This was none other than one of the famous White Horses, which on that day

must be scoured, that is to say, cleaned of ten years' accumulation of weeds and grasses; though it was said that less plantains were uprooted than matches made that day, and that the true business of keeping the White Horse duly scoured was performed by some sober shepherd with a pocket-knife, idling away the hours while his sheep moved slowly within his sight. Nevertheless the tradition must be maintained. Clare felt a slight wistfulness that she might not join in with the party, but she had been for so many years strictly forbidden to do this by an indignant Martha Sparrow,—“ ’Twould not be befitting your station at all, Miss Clare, indeed, to go with those rough louts of boys and hoydens of girls,”—that she had come to accept this ban as a law of nature, without question. She therefore sat her pony at a distance, looking on enviously at the clumsy fun in progress, watching the boys roll over and over down the slope and get up dusting themselves and laughing, or wrestling with one another on the grass and making a show of their superior strength before the girls, who laughed and applauded. She felt especially envious when she saw Job Lackland pick up his fiddle, settle it firm under his chin, and begin to play, the notes of the old-fashioned tune reaching her as clearly as notes struck on a bell, and she could see the sprigged waistcoat and cut-away coat which Job always wore on feast-days when he thought he might be called upon to play the fiddle. The others scrambled

to their feet and began a country-dance, a sort of combination of a Morris dance and Sir Roger de Coverley, for they fluttered their handkerchiefs as they danced, and at the same time ran in couples up and down between two lines formed by the other dancers.

The muslin dresses and coal-scuttle bonnets of the girls, and the smocks of the young men, together with their fluttering handkerchiefs and their hands gaily clasped high as they turned and twisted beneath, made a coloured and merry patch on the top of the hill, like a lot of butterflies.

Job fiddled with increasing energy, and as he fiddled he tried to beat time for the dancers with his bow, so that every now and then he would miss out a bar while he waved his bow to re-establish order in the dance which threatened to become confused. At last they all fell exhausted upon the grass, and cider was passed round, and the old White Horse, who had been temporarily revealed during the dance, was once more hidden from view by the spreading frocks and sprawling limbs.

There were other preparations now in evidence, for to emulate the scouring of the greater White Horse of Berkshire the youth of King's Avon indulged themselves in more or less organised games, which again were but a cloak to their braggart vanity towards the girls. A rude platform was erected on trestles on the flat summit of the hill, and towards this the

whole company surged, leaving the white scar of the Horse once more exposed and placid upon the hillside. The direction of the games was in the hands of young Gorwyn; he beat a small drum to call his audience to order; he marshalled the competitors; he posted tow-headed Lackland with his fiddle to strike up a tune during the intervals.

The competitors stood in a group to one side, suddenly sheepish; the audience, which by now consisted almost entirely of girls, ranged themselves beneath the platform with the nudges and upturned faces of anticipation. Clare could only see the crowns of their hats and sunbonnets.

Half a dozen young men stood up on the platform, exposed to the jokes and encouragements of their friends; in their embarrassment they did not know what expression to assume; some scowled, some tried to stare with an indifferent gaze out over the distance, some sought the faces of their special friends among the audience and grinned awkwardly. All were in the same predicament as to how to dispose of their hands and feet; some stood stiff and erect, with arms folded severely across their chests; others thrust their hands down into the pockets of their breeches; others bent to fidget with a bootlace.

Some were for wrestling, others for the races; the bolder spirits, and the most admired, were for broad-stick. Gorwyn himself, the broadstick champion of the village, was, as the last and



principal event of the day, to challenge the winner.

Clare, growing interested, rode a little nearer; the young men touched their foreheads to her, some of the girls dropped a curtsy; her advance caused a little ripple in the crowd. Again she felt the slight regret that she might not mingle freely and on an equal footing with them; surely they were clean, English young men, honest enough if a trifle crude, and the girls were healthy and fresh in their muslins; but she was too simply a child to dream of disobeying Martha's mandate. She sat her pony at her distance, looking on.

The first event was a bout of wrestling; not perhaps, a very scientific exhibition, but the rivals went at it with a will, good-tempered and full of zest, staggering about the platform, their fine, young-men's bodies knotted together like a piece of ever-changing sculpture in a natural setting, not cooped into the dinginess of a studio or a gallery. Clare saw the shock heads imprisoned under an arm, or going to butt lowered like young rams; she could hear the deep breathing, and the muffled shock as limbs and torsos closed anew together.

And the audience of girls cried out and applauded, or uttered little screams when a fall seemed imminent; but the wrestlers themselves were silent, save for their heavy breathing; and the feminine cries and rustlings of admiration

or dismay formed the natural accompaniment to the masculine concentration.

The wrestling over, the wrestlers descended to mix in with the girls, and the competition was eager and frank among the girls to get possession of one of these heroes and to keep him by her side for the rest of the afternoon. Only Annabel Blagdon, the belle, remained unexcited and scornful; she affected to despise the mere wrestlers: broadstick was the only game for her, as she had already advertised, and her smiles were reserved for some broadstick champion with his broken head. Therefore the wrestlers made for her all the more; made awkward advances towards her, neglecting the blandishments of the others which were lavished too cheaply upon them. But she scarcely answered; she knew her power, she knew and savoured the irritation of her sisters; she tapped her foot in its white stocking and black strapped shoe, and scorned the wrestlers for their undamaged skins, though secretly she could not help esteeming their broad shoulders and their narrow loins.

Job Lackland meanwhile had struck up a tune on his crazy fiddle, and made the air gay with his old jingling melody, until the tapping of Gorwyn's little drum announced a fresh event; this was a race after a cheese down the steepest side of the hill, an all-but-perpendicular bank, round which the ordinary pedestrian would have skirted, but the lads started down it helter-skelter after the round cheese which was bowl-

ing down, bumping and jumping, after its send-off push. Some few of them kept their feet, others slithered down on their backsides, like boys on an ice-slide, some in their effort to keep upright tumbled head over heels; one, a wag, went down, rolled round in a ball, hands locked under knees, in a series of somersaults.

No one was hurt, and the girls peering after them over the top, laughed and danced in delight as the medley of arms and legs and bodies reached the bottom, and a scrum for the prize ensued. It was finally carried off by Olver Lovel, who, it was averred, crept in between the scrambling legs and fetched it away in a moment when the object of the race was forgotten, and only the fun of the scrimmage remembered.

No one quite knew in what spirit to take Olver's success. It was too unpopular for congratulations to ring genuine, so most of the party turned aside and pretended to be busy with other things, sooner than betray their disappointment,—for they were kindly folk,—and to spare themselves the necessity of smiling to Olver. In fact, it was felt that a slight chill had been cast over the afternoon by the simpleton getting the better of the cheese.

As for Olver he was quite happy with his cheese, which was large and round, and beside which he sat at a little distance on the grass, occasionally patting it and stroking its smooth cool rotundity. Clare let her interest stray from the platform, in order to observe him; like most

of the others he had put a wreath of sorrel and grasses round his hat, but whereas the others acquired thereby merely a merry-making, country appearance, Olver was made to look crazy and erratic, and twice as simple as usual. He sat now on the grass making a daisy-chain to go round the belly of his cheese; his legs were stretched out childishly straight in front of him, and his shovel hat with the waving wreath was bent down over his occupation.

Simple, thought Clare; but how quick and cunning were his fingers! that was no unmixed simplicity.

He reached out his daisy-chain to measure against the cheese; he was engrossed and took no notice of any one or of anything. She wondered whether Nicholas Lovel knew that Olver was up here; usually he kept his brother away from any gathering of the villagers, lest he annoy them in any way. She had already noticed that Nicholas was not of the party and smiled to imagine him as one of that hearty gang. She even wondered the more, so aloof did he keep himself from the rest of the village, that he allowed his brother to join with them. But she remembered then that he made laws for himself only, and did not expect others to keep them; he was too indifferent, rather than too tolerant, for that.

Clare thought that she would wait to see the broadstick contest, which apparently was about to take place, and that she would then ride away,

for she knew that as the afternoon advanced, and especially as the discreet twilight arrived to throw its veil over the passions aroused by the prowess of the games, the party would become less rowdy, less athletic, and more sentimental, more inclined to break up into couples and to dispose itself thus about the grass, where no cover existed, but where privacy was guaranteed by a tacit convention that all wore blinkers. Clare remembered then,—what Martha Sparrow, gossiping, had told her,—that Olver Lovel sometimes made himself very unpopular by creeping up noiselessly behind some pair just as they were circling round the most critical stages of their courtship, either to shout loudly in their ears or else to tickle the backs of their necks with a straw, so that it had even been discussed in the Waggon of Hay whether he should be ostracised from the festival of the scouring. The threat of ostracism, however, had not been carried out. They were all too much afraid of Olver and of the tricks he might play in revenge on them, worse than shouting in their ears, or tickling the backs of their necks, or even than putting caterpillars up girl's legs, which he had been known to do; and in a less degree they were also afraid of his brother Nicholas, not to mention the old mother, whom none of them had ever seen, and for whose continued existence they had to take Nicholas' word for granted.

Perhaps this fear of the Lovels, and of the queer powers they were reputed to possess,

weighed even more with the ignorant village folk than the rough, kindly pity they felt for Nicholas in the affliction put upon him.

Clare was eager to watch the broadstick play, which she had never seen; Martha had told her that those who had taken part were to be seen going about for days afterwards with bandaged heads, and even kept the bandage on for longer than they need, as a badge that they practised the old sturdy sport, and that he who carried off the honours was entitled to the respect of the men in the Waggon of Hay, be they natives or strangers passing through, and that there wasn't a girl in the parish would refuse him her lips. Martha, quite carried away, had given her these accounts with enthusiasm. Clare had teased her, "I believe you remember a scouring when you were young, Martha," and Martha had blushed and bridled, and declared she saw no harm in having once been as young as Miss Clare herself, and went on to relate that once she had been to the scouring of the great White Horse of White Horse Vale, where teams of the Wiltshire men met teams of the Berkshire men at wrestling and broadstick, so that it was not the little family affair of the King's Avon White Horse, but a great celebration that lasted two days, and included roundabouts and side-show booths. But broadstick play was dying out, and young men were not so keen to get their heads broken as once they had been, which was a pity, for it showed up their manliness, in spite of what



the parsons might say; that was Martha's view.

Therefore Clare was especially anxious to see the play, for she thought she might never have an opportunity of seeing it again.

Just then she heard the trot of a horse on the turf behind her, turf baked so hard that it rang hollow. She did not turn round, but sat waiting for the horseman to come up beside her. "So," she thought to herself, as a little expectant smile parted her lips, "Lovel has come after all to have a look at the scouring." The trot slackened into a walk, and the head of a horse came alongside that of her own pony. A voice said, "Good afternoon, Miss Warrener," and looking round she saw a man with iron-grey hair in the act of lifting his hat to her; but he was not the man she had expected.

"Mr. Calladine," she said, smiling after her first little shock of surprise and disappointment.

"So you, too, have come to look on at the scouring," he began. "Whenever I hear of a scouring in the neighbourhood I am enticed to watch it, and every time I go home realising that I have wasted my time. But, after all, as well ride here as anywhere else, and better, if I am to have the good fortune of meeting you."

Clare was far too unpolished and simple to know how to reply to such compliments. She only blushed, was angry with herself for blushing, and stared the harder in silence at the party on the grass. Calladine saw her deepened colour,



and savoured to the full its unconscious charm; he leant forward with a creaking of saddle-leather, his gloved hand resting with the bunch of reins on the peak of his saddle.

"Will you ride a little way with me? There is not much more to be seen here, and I fancy they have noticed us, and are getting shy. Ah, it's too late, for here comes young Gorwyn to offer us a drink. We must accept it, I suppose, and only pray that 't isn't in a cup they have all been using."

Young Gorwyn, the master of the ceremonies, the son and apprentice of the blacksmith, carried the cup of cider very carefully in his immense hands, like a child carries a nest, as though he were afraid of crushing it between them.

"Farmer Morland's brewing," he said, grinning foolishly as he offered it.

Clare drank; it was clean and sweet, pure apple-juice and sugar. She was then confronted by a difficulty with which she had no idea of how to cope: ought she to offer the cup to Calladine after having drunk from it herself?

She had always the uneasy feeling in Calladine's company that more ceremony was necessary than in her dealings with other human beings, conducted with perfect and unthinking naturalness. But Calladine, who was so grave and courtly, and who looked at her so intently while speaking to her, and again so intently while she replied, seemed to exact a different standard of manners.

In this case, fortunately, he saw her unhappy hesitation, and solved the difficulty for her by stretching out his hand for the cup and draining it right off.

But Gorwyn was watching, and, kindled by the unusualness of the day, winked broadly as Calladine drank, and said heartily, "There's luck to you both!"

"I hope so," said Calladine in a low voice. He glanced quickly at Clare; she had either not heard, not noticed, or failed to interpret.

"Admirable, Peter!" he said in a louder tone, as he handed back the cup. "Tell Daisy Morland from me and Miss Warrener, that her father's brewing, which I suspect she superintends, is first class."

Young Gorwyn grinned again. "But you'll stay to watch the broadstick, now you're here?" he said eagerly, since to him it was the great event of the day.

"Well, I think perhaps broadstick is scarcely a suitable entertainment for a young lady,—eh, Gorwyn?" said Mr. Calladine. "Races, or even wrestling, but scarcely broadstick,—a rough game, and usually unpleasant to watch at the end. I think Miss Warrener and I will ride away and leave you to your sports."

Gorwyn, who had at first looked astonished, opened his mouth to protest, then a look of contempt came over his ruddy face, succeeded by a sudden shyness; he mumbled something, and scampered back to his companions.

"Oh, but I wanted to see the broadstick," began Clare.

"My *dear* young lady," said Mr. Calladine, leaning sideways in his saddle towards her, "may I, for once, stand in the place of your father, and say that I am sure he would never approve of your witnessing this rough display, and indeed would be most grieved if it came to his ears that you had done so? May I beg you to have confidence in my judgment? Come, now, let us ride away together, and if you can obtain your father's consent I will promise to escort you to some fair where you may see the game,—will that content you?"

Clare, greatly disappointed, was too young to question Calladine's decision. If he said her father would disapprove, then he must be right; although, privately she thought that her father, mild and vague, would have no views at all on the subject. Obediently, however, she wheeled her pony after Calladine's horse, and they rode quietly away along the top of the ridge. She was thinking how sorry she was that he had come instead of Lovel. She did not very much like Mr. Calladine, although she was kind to him out of goodness of heart, because she thought he seemed lonely; indeed, he never ceased talking to her about his loneliness.

He lived some way out of King's Avon, right in the country; it must be, she thought, very lonely in his small farm-house in the evenings,

so she sometimes persuaded her father to ask him to dinner.

On such occasions, not knowing how else to entertain her father and guest, she would play to them both such simple airs as she could command upon the piano, and sometimes would sing, accompanying herself, such little songs as she had picked up from Martha Sparrow or the country people. Mr. Calladine would come then and lean over the top of the piano, watching her in the candlelight in that intent way he had. She did not like this either; it was part of his elaborate and disturbing manner, but she had too much pity for him to ask him to desist. He seemed to like her singing; he always clapped his fine hands softly together and begged for more. On the whole, she did not much enjoy the evenings he spent at the Manor House; they were strained and difficult; or, at least, so she thought, although he appeared unaware of this, perfectly content, and in no hurry to take his leave. When he at last did so, Clare, whose country idea of hospitality involved accompanying her guest to the front door to see the last of him, was always slightly relieved when she watched him button up his greatcoat, climb into his gig, gather up the reins, and drive away into the night.

His horse paced now beside hers, and, riding with his beautifully light hands, he restrained its paces to suit her pony's, all with that air of chivalrous deference which she found so subtly

irritating. It conveyed that she was not able to take care of herself, but that he must do it for her, in a playful, tactful way, while allowing her apparent liberty, and she felt now that he had taken her away from the games as he might have taken a little girl. It made her inclined to start her pony off into a gallop, but she reproved herself, remembering that Mr. Calladine was very much older than she was,—he must be quite fifty,—and that it was kind and condescending of one so fine and cultured to desire her company. At the same time, she could not help contrasting his manner with Lovel's; Lovel was often brusque and even rude to her; he lost his temper with her sometimes, and never apologised afterwards; it was all the more insolent in Lovel, for he was not the gentleman that Calladine was.

But she never felt with him the sense of strain that she felt with Calladine. It seemed to her as natural to meet Lovel upon the Downs as it would have been to meet a flock of sheep, and it never occurred to her either to mention or to conceal the fact to her father. Calladine, on the other hand,—she knew that when she got home, some obscure instinct would impel her to say, "Father, I rode with Mr. Calladine."

They had allowed their horses to follow their own course, which in that open country was possible for miles, and Clare now perceived that they were being carried in the direction of a group of Grey Wethers. She did not at all want to

go to these particular Grey Wethers with Calladine; but when she tried to head her pony away he immediately said, "Do let us ride on as far as the Grey Wethers, Miss Clare. We have never been there together, and I have a fancy to go there with you." Clare gave way; it was not worth hurting his feelings, perhaps, for a whim. They rode on accordingly until they came to the strange derelict stones, where, at Calladine's instigation, they got off their horses and sat down side by side on one of the stones. Clare wondered what the object of this pause could be; then, looking at Calladine, she saw that he was nervously twisting his fingers together, and appeared by the agitation of his manner to have something on his mind which he was trying to say. She was not much surprised; she had often seen him break out under the influence of some unexplained emotion, and waited quietly for what was to come. She was not much interested either; but if it did him good to speak, then, poor man, by all means let him speak his fill. Finally, she prompted him, almost with mischief, "You seem full of disturbing thoughts, Mr. Calladine?"

"I have something to say to you," he began. "An explanation, more than a confession. What do you know of me, after all? Very little, beyond that I am a stranger settled in these parts, living a lonely life in a remote farm-house with one old servant and a groom. You know that I have no regular occupation; that I read the clas-



sics in a desultory way; dabble in archæology, and interest myself in the local customs and topography. You know that my leisure is unlimited, and my means ample. You appear to take me for granted, but then I never attributed to you an inquisitive mind. Have you ever wondered where I came from, and why? have you, above all, never despised me a little for my idleness of a dilettante while all around you you saw other men work for their livelihood?"

"Perhaps I have despised you a little for that, she said frankly. "As for the rest, no, I don't think I have wondered. I don't see why you shouldn't lead the life that pleases you best."

"Nevertheless," he said, "I should like to give you my explanation, if you will be patient enough to listen. I loved a woman once," he said, in a low mournful voice, as though he were disinterring the memory of the dead from his very bowels, and while he spoke he kept his eyes averted from Clare and held his unseeing gaze upon the clump of beeches on the high skyline; "she was wholly a woman, yet every great quality of woman she lacked; I mean to say, that in every mood of capriciousness and grace she was as wholly and divinely a woman as any woman who ever enchanted man and coloured the loveliness of his days, but under the test of all graver issues her fluidity turned to falseness and she slipped between my fingers. I never held her; no, though I held her in my arms she eluded me; even while I thought to possess her, her soul slid



away from me in some new protean shape, and danced and laughed and mocked my pursuit. Oh, she was a will-o'-the-wisp dancing across the marshes of my life. For my life was indeed a marsh in those days; I sank in quicksands; I struggled out on to a tussock; I trusted myself again on what I took to be firmer ground, I sank once more, I was sucked back at every step, I was tempted to let myself sink for ever from sheer weariness and despair. But she,—she was at home among the treacheries and miasmas where she had led me; that light, vain soul could skim where I could only sink. "Do you wonder," he said, letting his eyes travel slowly round the clean sweep of the Downs, bare of all softness, and bringing them at last to rest upon her face, "can you wonder that I came to repair my life in this old, hard country? You may believe me or not, as you choose, but I got that image of the marsh so firmly fixed in my mind that to this day I can't bear to walk across a bit of swampy ground, or even along a muddy lane. You have water here, in your country, that's true, and plenty of it; but it's straightforward water: running rivers, and dew-ponds up here on the heights."

"It's true," she said; "'tis an old, hard country; and such ghosts as there are are bleached bones by now, dry and clean; there's no decay about them. Why, I think that the ghosts that walk among the stones must be as stern as the stones themselves; and that's my fancy."

"And mine too," he replied, considering her; "and if anywhere the uneasy dead return from their sleep,—though I am not saying that I believe it to be so,—it should surely be hereabouts, for in the last century there were enough tales current of witches and wise men, and similar fascinations of the simple, to raise the longest-dead of old Britons from his grave. But I scarcely think the local folk are much troubled with such ideas. They come more readily to you and me, for I am a stranger, as strangers are reckoned in country districts, where the years only begin to count as they pass into centuries; the space of time for an acorn to grow into an oak; and even you, who have been here all your life long, are not native born. The spirit of this country does not come to either of us as a natural right. We have learnt it, and so must remain always more conscious of it than those to whom it is as native speech."

She looked at him with the faintly puzzled expression of one who is out of his depth.

"Yes," she murmured uneasily, looking down at the ground, and kicking a lump of chalk into powder with the toe of her shoe. She deeply resented this association of herself and him as strangers to the country; Lovel would not have spoken so!

"You and I," he went on, for it caressed his soul merely to utter those words thus coupled, "tread at least as reverent intruders among the rings and barrows. We do not rest among them,

as the shepherds do, simply for shelter against the winds and sleets. I came to them for healing; and you, even had you not been born with the capacity for awe,—as you were, oh, as indeed I know you were!—would have learnt it from that wise old man, your father. I have thought watching him at that delicate fingering of his shards, how he had dealt out to you the store of his scholar's brain. To him, neat, tabulated, chronological, precise, but filtering through to yours in a strange jumble,—the painting of a bison on the wall of a cave, a man in thongs and bearskins sharpening a flint, slow glaciers crawling over England, kings buried on horseback in fuil panoply under a mound.”

“And did you find healing?” she inquired, catching on to the remark she could pursue with the least resentment.

“Oh, I found it, yes, I found it,” he replied, morosely, “if I may call that healing, which but exchanges one wound for another,—a poisonous wound, let us say, for a clean sharp one. Yes, I may call it healing, I suppose, for although my heart's blood ebbs away through the fresh wound, there is no longer any gangrene in my system. I am purified; true, I may be dying, but at least I am purified. Yes, I found healing.”

“Dying?” she exclaimed.

“Oh, I spoke figuratively,” he replied with a toss of his hand; “don't be afraid, Miss Clare, that in the course of your rambles you will come upon my body toppled down the side of a bar-

row,—though how should that distress you, indeed, beyond the ordinary shock of stumbling across a man recently dead? I am healthy enough of limb for a man of my age. Fifty, I am, you know,—old enough to be your father. It was kind of you to ask whether I found healing, and I am thankful to be able to tell you that I did find it; the winds of my first winter, which nearly blew my head off my shoulders and sent it bowling along these slopes, blew away my noxious thoughts. I told you I was led into miasmas; well, I brought them up here, clinging about me like a cloud, and the wind blew them away.”

“Yet you spoke of that woman just now with a good tang of bitterness,” she said shrewdly.

“Ah, well, I grudge the wasted years,” he returned, as though desirous of dismissing it thus lightly. “You may take my word for it, Miss Clare, that I have never bared that story to a soul except yourself; and probably should never have bared it to you but for some foolish, trivial reason I was anxious that you should hear it. Now that you have heard it you shall not be troubled with it again, I promise you. It is, moreover, an old story now; a score of years old, I should say, though I have forgotten the dates, and in the ordinary way of things I never think of it now. But people hereabouts have gossiped about me, I know, as was only natural, and lest any story should come to your ears, I prefer you to know the true one. You know it now; you

know I am neither a prisoner escaped, nor a deserter from the army, nor a hunter of buried gold, nor any of the things which I have no doubt the village has credited me with, but simply a man once disappointed in love, as the saying goes, though Heaven knows whether those who coined that saying knew what they were talking about, or to what tragedy they were putting a name."

"All that's said for my benefit," said Clare sturdily; "you do think on it now, and you haven't forgotten the date; though maybe you will cease to think on it, since you've spoken it out; and it's no longer simmering in your heart."

He was gratified that she should so readily have caught that inflection in the voice which was meant to convey courage under sorrow, rather than forgetfulness after the passing of years.

"And should trouble come upon *you*," he said very earnestly, "would you place your confidence in me? I ask it as a favour,—as a slight return. Whatsoever a duty a man might perform for you, will you call upon me and no other? You cannot know how happy your promise would make me. You are youth incarnate amongst these ancient hills." He dared not say more, but continued to gaze at her with urgent and beseeching eyes.

"Why, I think I can promise that," she said slowly, though puzzled again and perplexed by his earnestness. "I think one could place con-

fidence in you, although you are so strange and unaccountable both in your ways and talk. I think you would be as vehement in your friendship as you seem to be in your thoughts. I think you would grieve very much," she continued, examining him, "if you were to fail in carrying out a mission for a friend."

"For you," he interjected. "My service is not so freely placed at everybody's disposal. You will have no rival claimant on my obedience."

"Well, I will give you my promise," she said, "though I would have you understand, Mr. Calladine," she added with a childish importance, "that I am not in the least likely to make any call upon you. I am very well able to take care of myself, nor is any trouble, as you say, likely to come upon me."

"Hush, don't boast," he cried, looking fearfully round, and half in mocking he added, "Who knows what sardonic spirits may be listening to your boasting? Anyway, you have given me your promise, and I should like you to seal it. Give me your hand,—not so reluctantly,"—for he had felt it struggle faintly like a caught bird,—“we are friends, you know,—and for one who professes to have confidence in me, I declare you give proof of having very little,—now lay your hand upon this stone, and I will put mine over it,—now repeat this vow after me . . .”

"No, no," she said, frightened, and trying to



draw her hand away; "it's profane; that may be a sacrificial stone for all we know . . ."

"And so resent the invocation of a Christian God?" he completed for her with a laugh, but the extreme agitation of his manner underneath his laughter alarmed her. "Or is it of me, and not really of the stone, that you are afraid? Surely you cannot think that your own Grey Wethers would harm you? So it must be of me, —a bad beginning to your confidence! Why, before very long you will be giving the same promise to another man lest you should require defence against myself."

"I was never afraid of any one yet," she said, flaming up, "Mr. Calladine, and as a proof of it there is my hand; now do what you like with it. I think that you are very bitter and wild, but I am sure that you would not make the worse ally for that. And no woman would say less than that you were wild and bitter, if she had heard you talk the way I have often heard you talk; but that does not mean that I am afraid of you, for I am not, nor of any one in this world," she repeated, challenging him to contradict her.

"No, daughter of the Downs," he said with much gravity, still holding her hand in his own.

She stamped her foot.

"You laugh at me, Mr. Calladine; well, if you treat me as a child, why exact such promises from me as the one you have just asked for? But I am not a child; I am nineteen," she said.

"My dear,—my dear young lady," he said,

amending the endearment into that conventional phrase, "it is only because you are, or soon will be, so very much of a woman that I besought your promise. Come, solemnize it without any further delay; swear, not by the Christian God, but by the Grey Wethers themselves, by their age, and their mystery. You will have the advantage of me if you can devise an oath more potent or more occult."

He laid her hand, which he had not relinquished, palm downward upon the stone. The stone was cold to her touch, but Calladine's hand pressed over her own was by contrast dry and burning. She swore as he had commanded her to do, half in derision of his fancifulness, half still in the lurking alarm she was too proud to betray. He appeared to be satisfied, and released her, though not without reluctance at letting her hand go, and for a moment he wished he had never taken possession of it, when he noted the alacrity with which she took it back, and the surreptitious rub she gave it on the side of her riding-coat. "So that is how she feels about my touch!" he said to himself, but only a greater gentleness stole into his manner as he thanked her for her compliance and held her stirrup for her to mount her pony. She sat easily, boyishly, in her saddle, looking down on him, and a certain melancholy, that was not without its solicitude on her part, and its wistfulness on his, overcame them both in reaction to the overcharged scene which had taken place between them.

"I don't want you to be unhappy,—indeed I don't," she said, "Mr. Calladine; and please do not think it impertinence on my part to assume that you are. I know of course that I am too young to pry into your affairs; I haven't the wisdom necessary; in fact I haven't any qualification except sympathy, and I do ask you to believe that I have that. We have been friends for such a long time," she said, looking down at him as though she felt a passing though true impulse to come closer to the bitterness of his spirit.

His hand resting on her pony's neck, he looked up with a rueful gratitude, by no means displeased that she should use the words "wild" and "bitter" about him, or treat his sorrows with so much veneration. He had not the heart to break her illusion of her own kindness with scornful words, but gave her a smile, which cost him a greater effort than he would have cared to acknowledge, and which he hoped would be adequate to reassure her. She smiled back at him, brightly; and with a touch of the heel put her pony into motion. He watched her ride away, along the ridge of Down, her slight figure swaying easily to the pony's walk; and presently he saw her break into a canter, and heard the beat of the pony's hoofs on the hard turf, until she was carried out of sight and hearing over the curve of the hill.

It was so characteristic of Nicholas Lovel to keep away from the Scouring! Clare thought

how the rest of the villagers must dislike him for his detachment. Not that he cared what the villagers said, beyond wishing that they would leave him and his affairs alone as far as possible,—a vain hope. Clare knew quite well that she could never have inveigled him into making friends with her but for their very early friendship when she was a child and he little more than a boy, when, in fact, he could not fear a rebuff from her, and, meeting her on the Downs, he had told her how to ride her pony, how to read the signs of the weather, and a dozen scraps of country craft which she had assimilated with great respect for his wisdom. They had drifted into a curious, desultory intimacy. Because they knew each other only in this detached way,—etherialised, as it were; stripped of the ordinary routine of friendship;—because she knew nothing of his life, and he nothing of hers; each knowing only the other's Down-life; each admitted only into the other's solitude, a part of that solitude rather than an intrusion; because they were really strangers to one another,—there existed between them a complete ease and understanding. All formalities were absent; they never thought of greeting one another when they met; they never thought of talking except when they could continue the current of their thoughts aloud. When they sighted one another upon the Downs, they simply converged until their horses fell into pace side by side. Often their first remark, spoken after long preliminary silence,

was without context or explanation, like a bubble rising to the surface from what had been going on within their minds beneath. To be together was like being alone. Clare never talked to Lovel about her father, or about the Manor House; Lovel never talked to her about his difficulties, or about his pursuits, legitimate or illegitimate. At times their talk was purely practical, when he would show her how to cast a fly, or how to throw a sheep for shearing, or how to twist a rough basket out of osiers; at other times it was all theoretical, and there was no puzzle, discontent, or aspiration they would not touch on or thrash out. Quite abruptly, sometimes, he would break off and leave her. She never thought of asking him, next time, why he had done so, any more than she would have thought of asking the breeze why it had dropped. There were weeks together in which she never saw him at all; he came and went in her life like the rover that he was. When they passed each other in the village, they gave no sign of recognition; they had never alluded to this, yet each knew that the other was amused by the tacit convention. She knew, of course, where he lived, though the site, appearance, and actuality of his dwelling seemed to her singularly unimportant. Half way down the village street stood a house, small, but very massively built of grey stones, quarried, in point of fact, barbarously from the monoliths that had been the constant resource of the local builders. The front door, when it stood open on to the

street, showed to passers-by a long dark passage, like a tunnel, at the further end of which opened suddenly the light and glow of the square walled garden, with its brilliant green turf, its one dark cedar, and its patches of sunlit flowers. The front door was surmounted by a porch, resting on two round columns; along the architrave of this porch was painted in neat black lettering the name: NICHOLAS LOVEL. It might have seemed curious to a stranger that no further indication should follow on to this superscription; there was nothing to inform the ignorant whether Nicholas Lovel was by trade a farrier, a joiner, a shoemaker, a tailor, or even the keeper of an inn; whether one might enter by the open door, and, taking one's seat at a table within, rap against a glass and call loudly for the landlord. But strangers were few and far between, and among the habitual population of the village the circumstances of the Lovels had been threshed out so often that you might have imagined the topic would fall upon wearied ears. There were few trades to which young Lovel could not turn his hand. He could plough a field,—and in straight furrows, too,—he could build a rick, and thatch it when it was built, he could repair a waggon or repaint a gig, he could get the better of a horse-coper at his own job, or of a pedlar at his own chaffering, he could cure a sick ewe and bring back to life a weakling lamb, he could cane a chair and twist up a basket of osiers in less time than it takes to tell, he could snare a rabbit and



slip under the very nose of the keepers, he could drink most men under the table and walk most men off their legs, and amongst the girls of the village there was not one who at one time or another had not set her cap at young Lovel, and got from him in return neither a civil nor an uncivil word. Yet for all these, and other, accomplishments, there was no one trade which he regularly practised. Any man might call him in for a stray job, whether as a farm-hand, a carpenter, or a shepherd, and many were the bribes which had been offered to induce him to accept regular employment: he declined them all. Gipsy Lovel, they called him in the village; whether on account of his name, his looks, or his vagrant practising, was not defined, probably all three. In appearance he was dark and lean; his Roman features bronzed to a polish, so tightly his skin seemed stretched over his bones; and with the brown corduroy breeches of an ordinary yeoman he usually wore a dark red shirt, which accentuated his already outlandish appearance. In speech he was reserved and sardonic, as might be expected by those who knew,—at least by report,—the circumstances of his life at home. Except by report, none could know them, for no one was ever invited to cross that most inhospitable of thresholds.

And further, there was Nicholas Lovel's younger brother Olver, by the kind-hearted given occasional employment on odd jobs of carpentering, house-painting, and the like, for he was

skilful enough as a workman, and could be trusted to carry out his directions with the fidelity of that kind of brain commonly known as "simple." He might have passed as a good-looking youth, with tight, chestnut curls and eyes of a curiously pale blue, rimmed with black round the iris, but for the oblique and cunning expression that was apt to cross his face like a cloud drifting across the moon, and the slight hint of deformity that clung about him,—a deformity so indefinite, that it was impossible to say precisely where it lay, whether in his neck being slightly sunk into his shoulders, or in his head being slightly too large for his body, or in his hands being slightly too well-formed, too sensitive for the hands of a workman, or in his tread being slightly too catlike for one of his build and bulk. He had in the village the reputation of slyness, a sudden shrewdness, that was disquieting and therefore repulsive in one whom mere simplicity would have entitled to the charity of all men. From this reputation of cunning the legend had grown in the village, as such things grow always in that fertile virgin soil of ignorance, the legend had grown into a variety of sinister shapes, all ornamented with copious and more or less picturesque detail: Olver Lovel's grandmother had been burned for a witch; his mother, who was kept in such seclusion now by the severity of Nicholas, was a witch also; Olver himself practised wizardry; he went out of his mind when the moon was full; he was mortally

feared by all animals,—this indeed was true, and a matter of common knowledge;—he controlled his evil impulses only through fear of his brother, but if his brother were to be taken away, then God help them all! These were only a few of the things that were openly uttered about Olver Lovel. Nicholas himself was not above suspicion. He had the same eyes as his brother, of the palest blue with those curious black rims, and the effect in his dark face, with his black hair, was certainly very strange. But people did not fear Nicholas as they feared Olver. Nicholas was a straight-forward man, reserved and uncompromising because his pride had so much to suffer, and no doubt his endurance too, living as he did between his two unusual relations; they had, on the whole, a good deal of sympathy and respect for Nicholas. It was no life, they said, for a young man. But who could help him? He would let no one near him, either literally or figuratively; pride was the hardest defence to deal with. A harsh young man; but he had much to put up with. And if he was harsh towards himself and forbidding towards other men, let them at least do him the justice to say that towards dumb beasts he had the gentleness of a woman for a child; ay, and the instinct too: the quick kind touch, and the certain remedy.

The villagers thought him lonely,—even lonelier than he actually was, for they knew nothing of the friendship between him and Miss War-

rener. They knew, certainly, that he sometimes went fishing with her down to the Kennet, but they thought nothing of that, for any young lady might be expected to take a man to carry her rod and landing-net, to fix her bait, and to deal with her catch. It wasn't likely that even Miss Warrenner would care to dabble in a mess of worms, or to get her fingers covered with scales, slime, and cold blood. No, nor to have the troublesome job of killing a pike, who of all the animal creation surely clung the most tenaciously to life. What they did not know of was the Down-life shared by Clare and Lovel; for on those splendid, solitary heights they could meet and meet again, unobserved by any save the sheep, the larks, and the circling hawks, indifferent to the pacing side by side of the two horses over the bitten turf. Various were the avocations which took Lovel to the Downs, and if occasion required he would call on Clare to lend him a hand, ordering her about, and she, meekly, followed his directions as an apprentice. She had even been in his shepherd's-hut with him all day during the lambing season, when a blizzard swept across the hills, and he had his hands so full with his poor ewes that must be tended and sheltered that he had no time left for niceties to spare Clare's feelings. With set teeth she had helped him that day, and had counted his brief comment at the end as a well-earned reward. And she had ridden away in the evening with her head held down against the driven sleet, and her

pony's mane blown right across his neck with little lumps of ice in the rough hair, and behind her the yellow light that shown in the window of Lovel's hut had grown smaller and more distant, and she had known that during the whole of the night and of many days and nights to follow he would keep the vigil attendant upon his trade, and would lay on the straw beside his little paraffin lamp the poor weak new-comers into so unpropitious a world.

In all seasons and weathers she had known the Downs with him, and like sailors at sea they had accepted the bad with the good, without thought of avoidance. Like all English country people, they disliked extremes of heat as well as extremes of cold; a high summer's day, when the heat winked along the ridge of the hills, held for them none of that poetic quality it holds for the idle. Their point of view was sober and practical; if feed grew short, they hoped for rain; if the corn in the lowlands were flattened by rain, they hoped for fine weather; it was simple. If the day were a holiday,—that is to say, if Lovel had taken no job,—then they were as content as any other idlers to lie soaked in sun upon the most exposed flank of upland they could find. They would pull the long grass to nibble it down to the juice at the end, or Lovel with a blade of grass drawn taut between his thumbs would shrill the empty air with strange whistlings, or they would tease the ants and small insects by walling them in with a circle of miniature chalk cliffs.

Their laughter spread with the song of the larks as fresh and clear as water, and the great spaces lay all around them with the cloud-shadows chasing one another down and over the slopes, and creating in their overhead passage the perpetual variety of mood and colour of the Down-country.

Down-country, so temperamental; in halcyon days bright and blithe; candid in its well-being, wholesome in its wind-cleaned delight; yet keeping in the valleys and sweeping folds the deeper shadows which gave it tone like the soberness of some latent melancholy. Upon the heights it would receive the sun, and glitter and rejoice like a woman in love, but the cup of the valleys was deep with a greater richness, with remembrance, and foreboding. So, although simple and large in outline, the country,—to Clare and Lovel personal, not inanimate,—was not simple with a shallow or trivial simplicity; not the simplicity of ignorance or emotional poverty; but with a wisdom that still had the courage to be gay,—the reckless gaiety of the profoundly tragic. No monotony was possible over that landscape of sunburnt tan, of blue distances, and stains of a lowering purple. No monotony, no sentimentality; the moods all visible at once over the range of country, all definite and certain of their intention, whether the naked sunburnt heights, or the brooding plunge of shadow.

Only in winter that ever-present reminder of tragedy fulfilled itself. In summer and in



autumn it robed itself in peacock colours, blue and bronze, a sorrow as sumptuous as the sorrow of a queen. But in the winter the splendour was gone, only an austerity like stone remained; grey disillusioned Downs, shaven by the winds, shelterless, inconsolable. Then came the snow; and up here, where no trees but the beech-clumps broke the white, where no hedges strove with their little maudlin pretence of security to lessen the rigour of the country towards the softness of man, here no flinching availed; grief was naked as joy had been naked, to be met and fought with, until that despondency should pass and the heights leap out once more into the sun of spring, with only the reverberations of the storm rolling still about the valleys.

Lovel, who resembled the Downs themselves both in his exuberance of spirit with the threat ever-lurking, and in his despair, which was so extravagant and so profound when it overcame him that it seemed he could never again lift himself out of the slough,—Lovel who for all his thought and his reading had never looked into himself or named what he would have found there,—Lovel who could no more control his moods than the Downs could forbid the sun to burnish their gold-brown slopes or the blizzard to rack them with a hell-ride of gale and sleet,—Lovel came upon Clare standing in the sun knee-deep in a dew-pond on one of the highest ridges of the Downs.

Her patient pony, well-accustomed, strayed

and browsed near at hand; he snuffed the dry thymy turf; he plucked with disdain at a tuft of grass fit only for sheep-pasture. This was not horse-pasture, this bare beggarly brown turf up here in the glitter of the sun, beneath the exposed and unsheltered windiness of the sky. Open country, open country; no higher peaks to climb; miles of open rolling country on every side. The clean and airy liberty of open country under a blue-and-white heaven. Clare stood in the circle of the dew-pond holding her skirts picked up above her knees. She was laughing; she had seen first the ears of Lovel's horse prick up over the rim of the hill, then she had seen Lovel himself, not looking to find her, then the shoulders of his horse, breasting the sharp climb, then the complete slim silhouette of horse and rider and two dogs at heel. And she had hailed him; a shout of laughter mingled in with his name; she had hailed him. At the top he had drawn rein, shading his eyes against the sun, and looking down he had seen her, standing down in the bowl of the dew-pond. He had caught her in the act of hesitation, afraid lest she should venture out of her depth. Capless, she stood in the dew-pond, holding up her skirts, and her white legs disappeared just below the knee into the water. She laughed up at him, holding her head a little on one side in the way he knew well, which gave her a fleeting and elusive appearance, so that her mouth and eyes seemed to slant upwards with a fugitive and sylvan air, which materialised

but rarely,—or when, as now, he caught her at an angle,—but which always hovered there, not always willing to be revealed, but ready to glance out at the right summons, to whomsoever should hold the shibboleth to produce it.

He drew rein, looking down at her, and her pony whinnied a recognition, and strayed loose to join Lovel's horse.

"Not deep!" he called to her.

She ventured a few steps further.

"You have seen it empty," he rallied her.

"Do you know the secret?" she asked, stepping. The water, disturbed by her advance, rippled round her knees.

"Very few know it," he replied cryptically.

"Ah, but you, Lovel, you know all those secrets. How do they puddle the clay? How, to hold the water? I am sure you know it, Lovel! Are you a dowser, too? they say so, in the village. They say you can pace over the country until the hazel-twigs jump in your hand. Is it true?"

"They say a lot of things in the village," he replied laughing.

"Does it matter to you what they say?"

"Not when I'm up here," he replied, tossing his head, and his horse tossed his head too, and the bridle jingled.

"Well, but tell me the secret of how they make the dew-ponds," she persisted, kicking with her foot into the water.

"The secret would soon be a secret no longer,"

he answered, putting her off. "And I never said I knew it."

"Ah, but you do," she said; and thought that those who knew the secret of the dew-ponds got their knowledge in a straight line of tradition from the earliest inhabitants of those regions. "Oh, I do envy you, Lovel," she said, forgetting that she stood in water and stamping with her foot so that it splashed up round her, "I do envy you all the queer things you have got behind you,—they all seem to run into your fingers with your blood."

He laughed again,—he seemed to be in a good humour to-day, and well he might be, with the bright grass glistening round his horse's feet, and over his head the bright blue-and-white spaces where the kestrels hovered like little specks, and the green pattern of the fields far, far below. He leant over in his saddle to pat the neck of Clare's muzzling pony; they were very much alone up there, with the two horses and the two dogs, and the clouds racing by. She stood in the dew-pond with that fleeting look still upon her face, as though she were a nymph,—a nymph of English uplands, of so fresh and candid and sky-mirroring a thing as a dew-pond. The olive and the myrtle were alien to her; the pony and the sheep were her beasts, not the goat; the round pool of water at her feet shone like the fallen shield of a young Amazon. He looked down at her; she looked up at him; they both represented their own particular aspect of

romance, each to the other. "Lovell!" she said, happily. They shared well-being; their own physical well-being, and the wholesome cleanliness of the Downs and sky.

It was some days after this that Clare received from Calladine an invitation to visit him at Starvecrow. Although she was immediately aware that she would not reply with a refusal, she felt a shiver of chill as though she had been beckoned in from the warm sunshine to a cold and cavernous place. The impression was alarmingly vivid both in generality and detail. She had met the groom coming up the short carriage-drive of the Manor House, and after reading Calladine's note looked up at the gaunt, raw-boned animal that the groom was riding, at its ugly quarters, and long melancholy head; she looked into the basket in which Calladine had sent her an offering, and saw the trout lying on their bed of long grasses, neatly ranged, pointed nose alternating with forked tail. The gift seemed to her gruesome and faintly absurd; trout, cold, plump, and dead. Yet on the evenings when she had gone fishing with Lovell under the willows, the trout as they laid them in the long lush grass had seemed gleaming and iridescent, cool from the water, and together they had examined the scales on the meshes of the landing-net. Lovell had lifted up their gills with his fingers, and had compared them to the under-side of a mushroom. But these trout of Calladine's

were merely dead; their eyes protruded; their gills were closed. She glanced up at the groom, and fancied that a despondency clung about him as about his horse, an absence of joy; and then she thought that this gloom came upon Calladine's possessions because he revelled in having it so; the very name of his house, Starvecrow!—had he taken the house for the sake of its name! had he bought this horse because of its starting bones and dejected droop? engaged the groom for his sallow, unshaven appearance and lank hair? dismal envoys that he might send in reminder from Starvecrow out into a cheerful world?

She turned slowly towards the house, carrying the basket of trout on her arm. She had sent back a message of thanks to Calladine with an intimation that she would visit him on the following day, and already the prospect of this visit was hanging over her, damp and chill. Listlessly, when the afternoon arrived she put on her muslin frock and her big straw bonnet, listening meanwhile for the sound of wheels on the gravel; she saw her own reflection in her mirror, saw herself cool and outwardly serene, but the picture gave her little pleasure. This with Calladine was one of the few appointments she had ever made in her free life, and it irked her curiously. From the first moment of her waking in the morning she had felt tied. Like a hobbled colt she wanted to kick herself free. That her afternoon should be restricted, ordained in advance,—



in the midst of her resentment she had laughed at her childishness, had been ashamed of her egotism. What would become of her were she suddenly to find herself bound for life? She had been content to look after her father's innocent wants; she had not shown herself selfish towards him; she could absolve herself from that charge; but then, he had not encroached on her comings and goings; she had given freely from love what she might have refused from duty. This appointment with Calladine was a duty; now she was tied; she could not take her pony or her fishing-rod this afternoon if the whim seized her. No, she must wait obediently for the arrival of Calladine's gig; she must climb into it and sit meekly beside the sallow groom while he drove her to Starvecrow. Arrived there, Calladine would be waiting for her, and his pleasure would be her irritation. The appointment which had been a restraint to her would have been only a delight to him. A sulky child, she stared out of the window for the approach of the gig. She heard it now; the scrunch of the wheels, the clomp-clomp of the horse's trot, and now it came into sight, the familiar high, ramshackle affair, gaunt horse and all, clanking up the carriage-drive and stopping in its abrupt, dislocated way in front of the door. Clare went down. Martha Sparrow was in the hall; she crooned over Clare in her lilac-coloured gown. "A flower come to life, my pretty child. . . ." Mr. Warrener came out of his study; he saw Clare standing in

the shadowy hall with Martha fingering round at her flounces; he pushed his spectacles on to his forehead. "Why, Clare, where are you going?" "To Mr. Calladine, father, I told you." "Ah, to be sure, to be sure; well, he has all the luck; you're a pretty thing to see." She kissed him, laughed, sprang up into the gig, it started off clumsily, swaying from side to side, and the Manor House was lost to sight behind the trees.

The gaunt horse spanked along the lanes; Clare did not talk to the groom, who drove with a serious concentration which promised no unbending. She wondered whether all the servants with whom Calladine surrounded himself were as unprepossessing. She was often more than a little impatient with Calladine for his deliberate mournfulness; but, more especially since he had told her in so strange a manner the history of his life's passion, she had tried to school herself into a reverent sympathy. She felt that she was very young and consequently ignorant, and that he was old, sad, experienced, and entitled to her respect. Instinctively she folded her hands in her lap, and sat demure. But in a moment she was again laughing at herself, and, although she tried to reprove herself for the levity, at him. The vexation of the appointment was lifting from her; her spirits rose, now that she was out in the lanes and could watch the caterpillars hanging from the oaks; she would not be affected by Calladine's gloom, by his

soberness, his measured smiles. Of what use could she be to him if she allowed herself to become as repressed in his presence as he was himself? Turning to the groom, she began to talk to him, persevering until she got a response, and even some growls of information about Mr. Calladine's stable; as Clare uncovered her own knowledge, the man became less grudging, and presently as their argument developed along lines of expert interest he was impelled to say that Miss Warrener evidently knew a horse when she saw one. Clare laughed merrily, and valued the compliment extremely. What she knew, she replied, she had learnt from experience and from Gipsy Lovel,—for she was glad of an opportunity of pronouncing his name. Ah, that was a chap for a horse, he said; or indeed for anything that went on four legs; that was the chap to go to a horse-fair with; Miss Warrener would never be cheated if she had Gipsy Lovel to give her advice. He seemed to have a feeling about horse-flesh; no need to pull their mouths open or run his hand over their fetlocks. He, the groom, wondered that Lovel didn't set up as a horse-dealer himself. He would guarantee that Lovel could take in most men in the county; yes, and the whole West of England, for the matter of that. Clare triumphed in his sudden loquacity. Even the gaunt horse seemed to be sharpening its pace,—though possibly that might be only because they were drawing nearer to Starvecrow. The groom laid the whip across

its withers, and it broke into a sort of bundling half-canter which rocked the gig up and down and obliged Clare to cling on to her big hat; she was amused, because she thought that this was the effect of Lovel. They had come now to a particularly deserted tract of country, along the foot of the Downs; and, after climbing the slope a little way, they saw a group of buildings upon an eminence, sheltered,—if shelter it might be called,—by a thicket of wind-blown thorn upon the easterly side. Other trees there were none, nor any other houses within sight, nothing but the tan rolling of the Downs and the road that climbed the hill and was lost to sight over the other side. She descried Calladine there at his gate, waiting for her, exactly as she had expected to find him. “I hesitated between coming to fetch you myself, and remaining here to welcome you when you arrived,” he said, as he came forward to help her out of the gig.

She knew at once how pleased he was to see her. There was no affectation about his pleasure. It was a tremendous event for him to receive her at his house, and he conducted her with infinite solicitude, and a half-hesitation which, she knew, was intended to give her the opportunity of noticing and commenting upon every detail. By a curious process now all the naïveté of her childishness and her upbringing dropped from her, and she became as delicately gracious as any skilful woman; she remained a little aloof from him, receiving his deference as

though it were her due, rewarding him in exchange with her friendliness and her interest, smiling at his eagerness with an amused and sympathetic smile, placing here and there the word of approval he most desired, and bestowing upon his possessions the appreciation or the gentle derision which for ever after would advance them in his eyes. He had never before seen her in this mood. He was bewildered and charmed. He had known her delightful and inconsequent, wayward and perplexing; he had seen her as a child, he had thought of her as a spirit, he had never yet seen her as a woman. Her very gestures, he thought, were different; quieter, more secure; and yet she had not lost that fugitive air of hers, that shy grace; the combination enchanted him. He followed her into the house; he was sure, now, that Starvecrow was pleasing her; he need not have been so apprehensive. To rest his eyes upon her in his little hall, so cool in her lilac frock, filled him with the deepest and most disturbing joy. It was he, now, who grew tremulous and at a loss, while she remained so exquisitely self-possessed. Seeing that he scarcely knew how best to carry on his hospitality,—for he seemed incapable of anything but of gazing at her,—it was she who led the way into the inner room, and touched his books and looked at the pictures on his walls, and at the view out of his window. Had he but known it, she was thinking Starvecrow worthy of its name, a desolate place, in a situation without the grandeur

to compensate for its austerity, and without the comfort to excuse its meanness.

"You should plant some cottage roses against your house," she said, "and some bushes of Old Man's Beard."

"It shall be done," he replied, without taking his eyes off her.

She sat down in his worn old leather chair, took off her hat, and hung it on the chair-knob. She seemed to him to light the room by her presence, the room which was dingy if not actually poor, and which had never before had in it anything so delicate and fresh as Clare with her muslins and her small yellow head leaning against the chair-back. But he was afraid almost of speaking to her, lest he should scare her away, so like was she to some small shy animal which by wary gentleness he should have enticed into his home. "You are wearing all the colours of the dawn," he said, "lavender and primrose," and ceased because he dared not go on to the blue of her eyes, that he thought like the blue of the early sky.

She smiled at him. "You have made no garden here, in all your twenty years," she said. "You should build a wall round a square enclosure, and fill the beds between your paths. The wall would protect you against the wind and you should grow lupin and iris and tulips, honesty, sweet sultan, and snapdragons, and a path down the centre between cottage lilies and China roses.



She was speaking against her own convictions; she infinitely preferred her Downs uncultivated; but her instinct, strangely indulgent towards Calladine, told her what would most comfort him.

"I have no heart to do such things," he replied, "but since you order it I will set about it immediately."

"Mr. Calladine," she said, leaning forward, "when you answer me so gravely, are you indeed serious, or are you laughing at me in your sleeve?"

"Serious! you can have no idea how serious," he exclaimed, tempted to speak out his whole heart, as he had never before been tempted, by the sight of her earnest eyes; and he got up, and walked about the room. "Don't you know, that your caprice would be my only interest? my only law? You are the only person," he said, recollecting himself, "that has taken an interest in my poor concerns,—cared whether I steeped myself in sorrow or dragged myself out into the wholesomeness of a new life." ("Ah," cried Clare's conscience within her, "how little I have cared!") "But for you," he went on, "I should have continued in my dejection; only your encouragement, lately, has revived me, and I have realised that I was not the old and finished man I had resigned myself to me. If you order me a garden, I will turn gardener at fifty,—if you, that is, will be my critic and my adviser, if you will command me to do this and do that."

She saw, then, how easily swayed he was, and how an idea could take possession of his mind, for beyond an occasional kindness she could not be said to have interested herself at all in his concerns or to have encouraged him to forsake the gloomy ways of retrospect or his solitary habits of life. Still she was very glad that his imagination should be able to thrive on such meagre nourishment; it did her no harm, and she was glad if it might do him good.

"You have surely thought for long enough about the past," she said idly.

Again he seized upon her words, and she reflected with some amusement that she had never imagined any one so susceptible to suggestion.

"I will act on what you say," he exclaimed. He went across to his writing table and took from his drawer an etching of a woman, slightly tinted, with coarse curly hair, cruel eyes, and a large beautiful mouth. Calladine tore it into fragments; he flung the pieces on the ground and stamped on them. "I never had the courage to do that before," he said, staring at Clare and breathing heavily; he looked really frightened at what he had done, and she knew that he wanted her to reassure him. For her part she wanted to laugh, but knew that she must not. "You should have done it years ago," she said sensibly, "instead of living in the house with that locked into your drawer."

"I used to take it out in the evening and pore over it until it nearly came alive," whispered

Calladine. He kicked the fragments with his toe. "You are my angel,—my guardian," he said, turning passionately to Clare.

She saw that the contradictory being was greatly shaken by what he had done. "He will regret it, and be glad,—be glad, and then regret again," she thought shrewdly to herself. She wondered whether she had done wisely in not stopping his hand: would he be freed henceforth, or would he be haunted? "Now burn those pieces," she said with authority, "or I shall think of you trying to piece them together again, when you sit alone here in the evenings." The idea was half-frightening to her, and half-absurd. "Burn them," she repeated, pointing to the grate.

There was no fire, but Calladine obediently gathered up the fragments and burnt each one separately, holding its corner to a lighted match. Clare watched him, thinking how familiar must once have been to him those shredded features, how he must have kissed that beautiful mouth and imagined that he sought for truth in those narrow eyes which only returned him mockery. He knelt beside the grate, burning carefully, and crumbling the charred paper between his fingers, piece by piece. She felt sorry for him suddenly.

"You must not be lonely without your picture," she said with great gentleness.

"I hated it," said Calladine; "let it go; you have delivered me. You saw her, didn't you, before I burnt her? you saw her exactly as she

was: I was no match for her." Clare thought that he could probably say this without exaggeration, and that, had she herself met the other woman, few words would have been necessary between them for the understanding of Calladine. How deep was the confederacy of sex! she had never thought of it before; she smiled at Calladine with a detached pity. "I have no longer any past," he went on, "only the present, hourly more lovely. Shall we go out for a little and leave the dust of the past to settle in this room?"

Clare was glad to go out, for the room was making upon her a sad and cold impression, but she found little comfort in the exterior of the house, ungarnished as it well could be. She began to talk to Calladine again about the garden he must make, for not only was she really distressed for his own sake by the bleakness of his dwelling, but annoyed, almost, in a feminine way, by the man's incompetence to deal with his own existence, and not unflattered, either, by his submission to her directions and the attentiveness with which he received every word that came from her lips. She saw that he clung to her as his salvation; she became more autocratic, with a pretty tyranny. She would transform his patch of desert into an oasis; she, over at King's Avon would think of this Starvecrow as blooming into gaiety and colour by her orders. Calladine watched her, and she knew that he watched. But she never allowed him to speak

of herself, keeping him rigorously to the business of his new garden; her laughter rang out, and she rallied him, awaking almost against his will the rare smile on his melancholy lips. At moments he thought, as he followed her about, that he must stretch out his hands and cry to her "Clare! Clare!" No one ever treated him as Clare treated him; other people always took him at the valuation he set upon himself, composed their faces to a becoming sobriety as soon as they perceived his own, and quitted his grave company with relief. He chose to construe their acquiescence into a grim sort of flattery. But Clare was privileged; Clare might assume whatever mood she would; he would endeavour to follow her, perhaps clumsily, for he had lost,—or liked to think that he had lost,—the habit of lightheartedness; still, she should teach it to him again and he would renew his youth.

He had come to the age when the sense of passing days induced a panic. Clare had youth, Clare had a reserve of youth on which he could draw without impoverishing her; he felt that she gave him life as surely as if he drank it at her breast.

She seemed, as she stood in the centre of the square she had designated as his future garden, to be all the flowers which should blow there presently at her command. He said this to her, in that courtly artificial manner he had of saying such things, with so much froth of emotion underneath. It was the first personal remark he had

made to her since they had come out of the house, and it gave him relief. But she only laughed again, and this time he could have shaken her with rough hands for her laughter, and for her holding off the words which would stifle him if they remained unspoken. "Clare," he said violently.

She glanced at him with that new self-possession; she was maddening him, though not with the purpose he would have attributed to any other woman. How she eluded him! how she would perpetually elude him! and so hold him forever. He knew himself to be fastidious enough to esteem only that which he had lost, or could never hope to seize. "Clare," he repeated, this time with a genuine despair.

They went back into the house, where tea had been made ready; she noted his preparations, the honey, the girdle-cakes, the fruit and cream. He deprecated them, "A bachelor's house . . ." "What could be better?" she replied; and had slipped from him once more. She ate heartily, borrowing a handkerchief to wipe the cream from her lips, unaccountably a child again, and a new bewilderment to him. He now felt that what he might have said to the woman of whom he had had a glimpse, he could not say to the child who trusted herself in his house, and he thought with baffled anger, how ably she managed her alternative of weapons. A spoonful of honey in one hand, and a cake in the other, she leaned forward, talking to him, he more helpless



than ever, and she more completely in control. He dared not think of his house when her presence should have gone out of it; he wondered whether he would suffer least pain by returning to his sitting-room directly the gig had driven away, by going for a walk on the Downs and returning only after dusk, or by driving her himself back to the Manor House. The idea of her going at all was intolerable; perhaps he had been unwise to ask her to come; perhaps he had only been at his favourite trick of turning the knife in the wound. But she was speaking, she was saying, "I shall come again to see whether you have prepared our garden against the autumn."

By her movement he saw that she was about to take her leave; he leapt out of his own chair and stood over her, saying wildly, "Don't go, Clare, don't; how can I bear your going? don't leave me again, stay with me a little longer, I can't face the loneliness without you," and a stream of incoherent ejaculations flooded from his lips, while his hands fumbled towards her, yet with a remnant of soberness he strove to restrain them. Clare looked at him calmly, with wondering eyes. "But I must go home if my father is not to be kept waiting for his dinner," she said.

Calladine stepped back instantly and released her. "I am sorry," he said. "The loneliness, perhaps, gets a little on my nerves." He passed his hand across his eyes. "You are the first vis-

itor I have welcomed here for many years, and your presence threw me off my balance." He tried to speak lightly. "Come, I will take you to the gig," but still he lingered, looking to see whether she had left anything behind, in a last attempt to delay her. "Shall I drive you home?" he asked desperately.

"No," she said, not wanting his company at all, "stay here and begin to dig the garden." She smiled. She was anxious to get away. Not until she was out in the lanes would she again breathe freely. She went without any appearance of hurry, thanking Calladine, who tore from his solitary rose-bush all the branches he could crowd into her arms, and climbed back into the gig as she had come. He saw her go, despair and joy and anguish rending him.

The strain and anxiety of being with Calladine drove her, as always, towards the wish to be with Lovel. "Brother," she could have called him, from the ease of his companionship. She could have put her hand into his, simply for the trust she had in him. But she knew too well that the indifference of his greeting would repulse instantly any such movement of confidence on her part; he would glance at her, when they met, and his glance would take her back into the assurance of their old intimacy, but there would be no softening of sentiment in it. Never that; a challenge and a bracing, but never compassion or a caress. Could she ever go with a trouble to Lovel? Her

instinct leapt up into an affirmative; he would listen gravely, would understand without commiserating, would counsel quietly, and would fortify her with a sense of his reliance in her trustworthiness. He would trust her to behave always as he would exact that she should behave. She would endure anything rather than disappoint Lovel. More: even in his absence, even though he should know nothing of it, she kept herself constantly up to the level of his standards. She winced at any thought of his possible disapproval. She had not for him, nor could she imagine herself having, the indulgent and,—school herself to reverence as she would,—contemptuous pity she had for Calladine; what had she told Calladine to do? to grow lupin and iris, tulips and honesty, sweet sultan and snapdragons, in a walled patch of what had once been Down-land! to *wall* the Down? was it possible that she had told him to wall in the Down? what gulf she must divine between him and herself, between him and the Down-country in which he had elected to live, if she could tell him to wall in the Down. Yes, even a square, a stray square of Down, forgotten between a lane and Starve-crow's farm-house. What would Lovel say, if she told him that? True, Lovel himself was sometimes set on to plough the Down, and willingly proceeded with the task; but that was different: that was the old struggle between man and the soil from which he wrested his daily bread; Lovel would tame the Down to grow bar-

ley for man or roots for his cattle,—a poor crop at best, extorted from the recalcitrant soil, like charity from an irreconcilable spirit, a poor crop, flaunting red poppies for its last flag of insubordination,—Lovel would plough the Down for that purpose, and relish the tussle, meeting in mutual understanding an adversary as stubborn as he himself; but for his mere pleasure he would not wall in a square to grow the effeminate flowers of decoration. They would blow and curtsey, Calladine's flowers, until a wind swept over them from the angry Downs and laid them low,—but stay, what had she said?—"The wall will protect them against the wind." Yes, and protect Calladine too: he could not stand up against the winds from the Downs. So, in her heart, she pitied Calladine and was disposed to see him protected? What had he done to deserve from her the insult of that charity? She had seen Lovel go out into a snowstorm on the heights and had not feared for his discomfort or his danger, any more than he feared for hers. Calladine she would have prevented with kind, firm words on the threshold of the door.

And it so happened, at her first meeting with Lovel after her visit to Starvecrow, that she, riding, sighted him in the distance following a plough-team over a curve of hill. He was not at work in one of the folds of the lower reaches, the favourite position for the rare stains of cultivation. He and his team were in outline against the sky, following the slow and classical

progression of the furrow over the curve; the hempen reins looped slackly from the horses' heads to his hand; the man, the horses, and the plough pursued their way, disengaged from all but the essentials of their labour, with the old inevitable simplicity. Clare rode towards the brown patch and, reaching Lovel, rode at a walk beside him up and down the freshly-turned furrows. The bright share cut cleanly into the sod, turning it over. They both watched it, as it slid through the sod, with a professional and satisfied criticism. "Poor soil," Lovel said once; otherwise they had not spoken. She liked to watch him plough, appreciating his dexterity, and the jump of the plough-shaft under his hand; she liked his voice ringing out to the horses at the turn. The slow rhythm soothed her. "Who are you ploughing for?" she asked. "Morland," he said briefly. "Shall you be finished by six?" she asked, looking across at the westering sun; and he nodded. "I'll wait," she said, and getting off her pony, she slipped the reins over her arm and stood watching Lovel without impatience.

At six he unhitched his team and came across to her, the horses slouching along behind him. "An ungrateful job," he remarked, staring resentfully at the stony furrows; "they never put me on to the loam; always the chalk for me." "I wish you had a bit of land of your own," she said. "Ay, I'd get the better of it," he replied, suddenly eager.

His team stood patient, heavy and shining compared to her small pony. The curious light of sunset began to creep over the Downs, turning their tan to a rosy orange. "Fine weather," nodded Lovel. He turned to his horses, and began to adjust a bit. The rooks were settling on the patch that he had ploughed. He stooped down, and picking up a lump of earth, crumbled it between his fingers. Clare, observing his fine, bony, downward-bent face, knew that he was reflecting. Sure enough, he raised it to say, "How would you bring them up, if you had children?"

"Have you been thinking about children?" she asked, amused.

"It's thinking about children," he replied seriously, "that shows you the things we base life on. There's money, there's humbug, and there's death. What do we say over and over again to children? 'Don't touch that, you'll break it, it'll cost money to replace.' 'Be polite,'—that's humbug. 'Don't do that, you'll hurt yourself,'—that's death, really, or at any rate the fear of injury. A child doesn't see much difference between being alive or being dead. As for money, or for time, which is the same thing, it takes him years to get his brain round those two things. It's a fine and careful system we've got, haven't we? While I was following the plough, I was having an imaginary conversation with a child. 'If I was dead,' said he, 'I shouldn't know that I was dead, so what



would it matter?' And I couldn't find an answer in my head."

"But if you had children of your own," said Clare, "you would find yourself bringing them up in the same way."

"Oh, perforce," he replied, "but that's the end of all theories. We're chained by necessity; it's the wire across the path that brings the horse down in mid-gallop. We've got to teach our children caution,—the fear of death,—merely to keep them alive until they grow up. And all that we should enjoy teaching them is obscured by the don'ts and the shoutings-out to keep their limbs whole and our crockery unbroken."

"Well,—and humbug?" she said.

"That's civilisation. 'What's polite,' asks the child, and 'what's a lie?'"

"Would you like to have children of your own?" asked Clare.

"Yes," replied Lovel briefly, and changed the subject. "I have to bring a handful of sheep home for Mr. Morland from the fair at Marlborough on Tuesday. Will you be going to the fair? Horses, mostly."

"I'll go with you," said Clare in delight, clapping her hands.

"Better meet me there, as 'twere by chance," said Lovel, suddenly a little grim. "'Miss Warrener taking up with gipsies,'—I can hear them talk. No, meet me there, make out you're interested in a pony, and fetch me to have a look at him."

"But we can ride home together?" said Clare crestfallen.

"We'll meet outside the town and come home over the Downs. I don't want all the gig-wheels in amongst my sheep."

She laughed suddenly, seeing how practical he was, and liking it.

He slipped the reins of his team from off the gate-post where he had hitched them, and hoisted himself, sitting side-ways, on to one of the great elephantine backs. He sat there, slack and swaying to the horse's tread, in the manner of all carters, and the other two horses lumbered after him, their hoofs going plop-plop in the thick dust of the road, and the hair round their fetlocks flopping as on spaniels' paws. Clare followed him, light on her pony. They did not become him well, she thought, those great horses; he demanded the slimmer, swifter animals of creation, hares, Arabs, or deer. But it amused him to play the plough-boy. How indifferent he seemed, she thought,—scarcely looking at her, riding on with his gaze held towards the sunset; how different from Mr. Calladine's eagerness to propitiate her; and a tiny sore of feminine vanity was pricked. Then she laughed at herself, immediately; what was she expecting from Lovel, her Lovel? expecting him to be different from himself? she would not like it if he were. And she knew that he was content to have her there, even though he never troubled to look around.

Lovel set off in a practical mood for Marlborough fair. He was thinking of the sheep he had to buy and bring home for Farmer Morland; in a way the farmer's trust provoked in him a sort of contemptuous pride, and, poacher and free-lance though he was, he would have scorned to make a penny's profit for himself out of the transaction. The commission was given him to execute; the farmer relied upon his honesty and his knowledge; the thing was simple: that was a trust of which he would not take advantage. On his lawless expeditions, he was betraying no man's confidence; the keepers all knew him, and, meeting him unprofessionally in the lanes, would exchange with him a grin and even a wink of understanding. They stood for the law, and he for the skill that would defeat the law; they knew it, and he knew that they knew it; that was a frank challenge, with sport in it on either side; but as for Farmer Morland's sheep, a mere matter of money, he would never demean himself to a bargain with the middle-man, and the farmer's interests, for the moment, were his own. He might next week be snaring the same farmer's ditches; that was a separate matter.

At the back of his mind, as he rode ambling along on the strip of grass at the roadside towards Marlborough, he retained the knowledge that he had arranged with Clare a meeting at the fair. The knowledge lay there, like a warm patch in his consciousness, and he enjoyed keep-

ing it just out of sight, while he directed his thoughts on to the sheep, and noted the farmers, shepherds, and cattle-men who streamed along the road in the same direction that he himself was taking, some on horseback going at a quick trot, some in their high spanking gigs, and some crawling in farm-carts with pigs and calves bundled up under a net. All the pastoral population of the district seemed to be streaming towards Marlborough along the great arterial road, and Lovel had no doubt that they were streaming equally towards it along the road on the further side of the town, and not along the main road only, but converging upon Marlborough by all the lanes and lesser roads, from Devizes and Savernake, from Ogbourne St. George and Ogbourne St. Andrew, from the Winterbournes and the Hintons. He surveyed them as they passed him; they were known to him for the most part, solid men and honest enough, their faces as broad and open as the country which had bred them; and the shepherds, who with their slow, limited movements seemed to resemble the animals committed to their care, contented in not having a preoccupation beyond the recurrent business of the animal year, with its breeding, shearing, and dipping; and the old wiseacres, who, although they no longer bought or sold, made a practice of attending all the local fairs where their fat cobs would carry them, there to criticise and shake their heads over the methods of their juniors. Lovel watched them all go by,

feeling himself slightly alien, as though he had been all the while conscious of his darkness beside their ruddiness.

Gig-wheels rattled and hoofs spanked crisply along the ringing road, and Lovel watched them go by, the stream, like life itself, hurrying past him. That old road had known the traffic of the past and present, and,—although there was not much to tempt his reflectiveness in the wide airiness of the light-coloured summer morning,—he said to himself, addressing his thoughts to the rubicund pre-occupied agriculturists, that after all the hair-splitting and tangle introduced by love, malice, envy, ambition, or their kindred, were cleared aside and done with, the main business of life was nothing more than the maintenance of life, else why all this buying and selling, this labour and breeding, this system which produced tilled fields and stout farmers trotting to market, cattle-pens in Marlborough market-place, and booths with headstalls and shovels? so that nine-tenths of the population were so taken up with the business of living that it was time to die before they had ever had leisure to take a look at life at all. Lovel, thinking thus, looked at them in his detached way with a little envy, a good deal of sarcasm, and a complex wistfulness, failing to find any meaning in the conclusions his logic had led him to. A lot of pother, just to keep alive; and for what purpose?

All over the civilised world, on which Marlborough was a speck, they were doing it; but

they would not understand Lovel if he told them so, and he knew better than to diminish his reputation of being a practical man.

And now in spite of all his thoughts which bore him away on absences of speculation, his horse, which had been carrying him more soberly along, brought him in sight of Marlborough, and he saw the concourse of gigs, from which the horses had been unharnessed and led away, standing parked with the shafts stuck upright in the air, and beyond them the lime-whitened hurdles which penned up the tossing sheep; he saw the gaitered legs moving among the open spaces; he heard the barking of sheep-dogs as they rushed excitedly round, he heard the cries of the vendors and the lowing of the puzzled cattle. A cattle-market and horse fair was to him no novelty; he got off his horse, and, not thinking any more now of the cumbersome system of civilisation which had gathered all those men and beasts together from their homes to the same spot at the same hour, he walked round surveying with as shrewd an eye as any farmer there the merits and demerits of the goods and livestock offered for sale. The principal business of the sale was not yet begun, but a good deal of private bartering and haggling was going on, and the sellers at the opening of their booths were crying their wares, whether wooden baskets, hay-rakes, tarred twine, leggings, hedging gloves, chaff-cutters, milking-stools, scythes, sickles, carters' whips, churns, shears, or in fact any of



the smaller articles necessary to pastoral or agricultural existence. The whips hung up in heaves made gay with scarlet braid; the wooden goods were displayed along the front of the booths, clean and newly-planed, showing the honest grain of the wood and smelling fresh of sawn edges and rosin; and on some of the booths, fluttering like flags, were hung coloured petticoats and shawls to tempt the men to bring home a remembrance to their women. There were tinkers too, selling shining saucepans, and gipsies with bead necklaces; a dancing bear ambling along on a leash; hokey-pokey carts, and a hurdy-gurdy; and outside the town, in a field, was encamped a travelling circus, with a round-about and a set of swings, that awoke in its progress shrieks of terror and ecstasy all over rural England. Among the various attractions, Lovel moved quietly and alone, his two dogs at his heels, as self-contained as their master. Several strangers threw curious glances at him, for his quiet step, which they thought stealthy, and the darkness and leanness of his air, which so differentiated him from the fair sturdy weight of the crowd of countrymen. Interrogation by these strangers evoked a glance and a reply, contemptuous in intention, yet respectful in its immediate hint of mystery, "Egyptian, they do say . . . queer tales." But Lovel, if he noticed these rare enquiries, paid no attention; he was accustomed to feel himself shunned and dreaded, and his dogs seemed to share his loneliness, for

they never crossed the road to nose another dog, but kept to Lovel's heels, and woke to interest only when there were sheep or steers to be shepherded, in the same way as the man was scornful and kept himself aloof, but spoke keenly and with authority when any question arose relating to his various professions.

Amongst the cries and distractions of the market Lovel tried to keep his mind fixed upon the sheep business which had brought him there, until that should be despatched, but there was another business which kept his eyes straying round, and that was the hope of perceiving Clare, a small and merry figure, with her pony's rein slung over her arm. He did not shirk, in his own mind, the desire he had to catch sight of her, or the sudden relief and satisfaction that sight would bring him. So long as she was there, Heaven might pour and thunder; but all would still be well. So long as he had not seen her, the sun might shine; there would still be a darkness at his heart. Lovel long since had faced this truth with resolution and a complete despair; but with no attempt to delude himself or to minimise. It lay quietly at the bottom of his heart, a quiet patch of certainty, which shouts and jostlings and an alert scrutiny of the frightened herds were powerless to disturb. It was there, like a thing he must put out of sight for the moment, but to which he would have to turn presently, when his business was finished; he would have to turn to it,—not reluctantly, but in due

course, like returning home,—he would have to attend to it, grapple with it, decide what was to be done.

He found that his eyes strayed round increasingly, looking for her; her continued absence produced an emptiness, in which all things seemed meaningless and noisy. Then he saw her, standing at a little distance chatting to the landlord of the Royal George Inn, and a great calm spread, lake-like, over him. She was at hand; nothing else mattered. He proceeded quietly to transact his business, having all his faculties now undistracted about him; he did not even want to look at her, now that he knew that she was there; she would wait for him and though they both stood talking to other people, without betraying the consciousness of one another he knew that they were really converging, that their two lives were really converging upon the same moment when they would join up and turn to leave the market-place, without a word spoken, together. Sure enough, next time that he looked up, she had drawn a little nearer; he was glad; he felt his absolute silent unity with her, without any question of command or submission on either side, an almost sexless unity, and one that had grown up without any agreement spoken in words.

“Those’ll be father’s sheep, Lovel?” said a voice ingratiating, at his elbow.

He looked down, and saw Daisy Morland, the farmer’s daughter, her large freckled face raised amiably to his between the puffed red ringlets.

Lovel disliked Daisy as much as Daisy liked him; he avoided her company as pointedly as she sought his; the fact that he was for the moment in her father's employ no doubt encouraged her to think that she had a certain claim on him; and now especially when his mind was bent upon Clare she seemed to him more than usually aggressive.

"I'll help you drive them home," she exclaimed brightly.

"No need, I have the dogs," said Lovel, and added, "thanks," which he was far from feeling.

"No trouble, you know," said Daisy, giving him a look full of meaning.

Several of their neighbours were watching the scene with amusement.

"Best let me take them quietly," said Lovel; "and anyhow," he added, as though that settled the matter, "I'm riding."

"Oh, but I've got the cob!" cried Daisy triumphantly.

"Best not," said Lovel, for he could think of nothing else to say.

"But I say yes," said Daisy. "Come, Lovel," she persisted in a coaxing voice, "my own father's sheep? You wouldn't stop me riding alongside you?"

Lovel felt himself beaten; he had, indeed, no reasonable objection to raise.

"I shan't be taking them by the high road."

"So much the better," said Daisy.

A clear voice said beside them suddenly, "Lovel, I have a favour to ask; I don't like riding alone in such a crowd of people, may I ask your escort back to the Manor House when you go?"

He turned upon Clare, who had come up unobserved, and saw the mischief beneath the request so formally and demurely proffered.

"Of course, Miss Warrener, I am at your service," he replied instantly, and they stood, for a moment, the two of them together, looking at Daisy, whose freckled face had grown suffused with an unbecoming red, that clashed with the red of her hair and spread patchily round her throat down to the opening of her gown.

"Forgive me for interrupting you, Daisy," said Clare serenely.

Daisy mumbled a "No matter, miss," class triumphing over sex.

"Can I get your pony for you, Miss Warrener?" said Lovel to Clare politely.

"I will wait till you are ready," said Clare politely to Lovel!

Their eyes met.

"Let us go," said Lovel irresistibly.

With the clamour of the market all round them they manœuvred the little flock of sheep out of their pen into a side-street, leading their horses till they should be clear of the town. The cries of the market place died away behind them,—the market place where Daisy still stared after them with a stare of dull, revengeful anger, too

stupidified to care as yet that the whole of Marlborough should have witnessed her humiliation. But, having no pride, she minded this less than the loss of the ride she had promised herself with Lovel. Miss Warrener had got him, taken him coolly away from under her very nose; they had drifted away together without any fuss as though they belonged naturally to one another. Miss Warrener! Who would have thought of meeting Miss Warrener at a cattle-market? It was not the first time, either, that Daisy had seen Lovel and Miss Warrener together, not by any means the first time, since she was not above following Lovel secretly and spying upon him up there on the Downs when he thought himself safe. But who could have thought that the girl would have come to Marlborough fair for the purpose of meeting Lovel? for Daisy had no doubt that that had been Clare's intention; and so cool about it, so lady-like, "Lovel, I have a favour to ask" indeed! "Lardy-da!" said Daisy to herself, mincingly, as she angrily imitated Clare's manner in her own mind, affecting to despise it, while really envying it as she would never have acknowledged.

She woke to the realisation that the market was still proceeding, with its shouts, its jostlings, and its huddling of beasts, round her immobilised figure, and, bestirring herself, she went in search of the fat cob, meaning to follow (at a distance, and keeping out of sight), Lovel and Clare on their ponies, who, she calculated, must by now



be driving the little flock before them over the crest of the hill.

And she saw them go, with the eyes of a jealous woman, and knew that during the two succeeding days, while Lovel kept the flock at pasture, Miss Warrener joined him again, and sat with him on the Grey Wethers; she saw all his length stretched on the grass at Miss Warrener's feet, and saw their fingers close together over some cat's cradle that they were playing. But she saw no more than that, though she watched so that there wasn't much that her eyes could have missed.

Lovel rode slowly away along the back of the Down, the woolly flock tossing and huddling along in front of him, in a hurried, senseless way, controlled by the barking of the two sheepdogs, who were swift to chase up a straggler, or to straighten out any unseemly bulge at the side of the flock,—that same flock that he had bought at Marlborough fair for Farmer Morland. Lovel, knowing he could trust his dogs, rode in an abstraction. The afternoon sun cast fitful, fan-shaped gleams down through the thin clouds, like sunbeams passed through a sieve, or seen through a veil of the finest rain; it produced an effect of shadow and wet gold familiar to him in his comings and goings over the Downs, but now for the first time it occurred to him to compare the outside world with his own life; and, while his meetings with Clare might stand for that wet

gold, the shadows fell mournfully into a yet more inevitable analogy.

He came down into the village by dusk, regretful as ever to exchange the heights for the hollow. Up there he seemed to shake off for a little the burden of his life, which as soon as he re-entered the ring of the village he resumed. He was, however, too well-accustomed to this sensation to pay any particular attention as he passed through the gap of the embankment. "Charmed circle," his mother had often croaked to him, but he always shrugged disdainfully, knowing well that his imagination was all too ready to be led away along such lines, and being determined to keep his good sense wholesomely about him. The tossing woolly backs of the sheep preceded him now in a long wedge, four or five abreast, down the narrow road; they bleated uneasily, and tried to break through the hedge on either side. "Poor silly things, ye don't like being penned up any better than the rest of us," Lovel said to them, as he bent from his horse to open the gate into the field, and called to his dogs to head off the flock, which crowded back helter-skelter through the gate and then dispersed themselves in a sudden browsing content in the field among the monoliths.

Lovel called off his dogs and pulled the gate shut again, with the crook of his riding whip. He surveyed the sheep for a moment over the gate: they were already grazing, dim shapes in the dusk, on the comparatively rich pasture after

the short turf of the Downs. "A good lot," Lovel thought professionally, "and all for the butcher to-morrow," but he had no sentiment to waste over the fate of the sheep. He rode on into the village, leaving the circle of the embankment with its few naked trees, behind him; ahead of him, the church spire rose up against the sky, and presently as he turned the corner the village street came fully into view, with all its necessary provisions for the conduct of existence: houses for folk to be born in, shops where they might purchase the paraphernalia of daily life, the tavern where they might be merry, the church where they might worship, be christened, married, or buried according to their passing needs, and the chapel where, if they were so inclined, they might differ as to their faith with their fellow-men. Church and Chapel Lovel ignored altogether, a work which his mother had begun for him by refusing flatly to have him made a Christian. "You'll call him Nicholas Lovel for all that Parson don't souse him," she had said, arms akimbo, to the indignant deputation of the parish.

John Sparrow was turning into the Waggon of Hay as Lovel rode past it. "Come join us, neighbour?" he said half in mischief; the wits of the village lived in constant hope that some day, some day, a liquor potent or sufficient enough should be found to loosen the lips of Gipsy Lovel, and what secrets they would hear then! Lovel was briefly tempted, then he shook his head, and passed on: his mother and brother

would be waiting for their meal for him, too helpless to begin without him since he had said he would be home by four. At that moment the Church clock struck six: he was two hours late, two hours he had idled away with Clare. He strung himself up to endure the reproaches with which he knew he would be greeted.

He left his horse in the small paddock at the back of the house, and, carrying the bridle and saddle over his arm, returned to the street and went into the house by the front door. The passage within was dark, but by long habit he found the hooks on which to hang up his gear, and at the noise he made in doing so, and the tread of his riding boots on the flagged floor, his brother came eagerly out into the passage, carrying a candle.

"Oh, Nicholas, is it you? Why, you promised to be home by four, and it is gone six; where in the world have you been all this time? I have been three times down the road to look for you."

"I wish you would do nothing of the sort when I am late," Lovel said curtly. He hated his brother at that moment, he hated the dark house and the implied reproach; his two hours with Clare flooded over him. "Is supper ready, at least?"

Olver whined, "I had forgotten about supper,—I thought only of you,—don't be angry with me, Nicco,—I know I should have set it out."

"It does not matter," said Lovel: if he got angry Olver would cringe, and whine the more.

"Give me the candle, I will see to it." He took the candle from Olver's hand, and Olver's strange eyes gleamed on him in its light with questioning timidity. The grandfather's clock ticked loudly out of the dark recesses of the passage. "I hope you have kept the fire going," said Nicholas, opening the door into the living room. Olver followed at his heels with the dogs.

The living-room was dark and low, lit redly by the logs in the open fire-place, and because there was neither paint nor paper on the walls the great stones of the masonry were visible. The eye looked down instinctively to find a floor of hard-trodden mud,—and was disappointed, for the floor here, like that of the passage, was formed of flag stones. There was little furniture: a centre table, which served for meals, a few chairs of cane and wood, a tall dresser reared against one wall, containing on its shelves the crockery for everyday use, and a shelf above the fire-place, on which stood a row of china fruits in bright, shining colours,—this comprised the sum total of furniture and decoration in the whole room. Lovel scarcely noticed what was in the room and what was not; he liked the stone walls, and would not have them covered up, but then he liked for the sake of their tradition and of the quarry from which they had come.

He now set the candle on the table, and got from out of the cupboard under the dresser a loaf of bread, some cheese and butter, and the

necessary knives and plates. He did this menial work mechanically; he had long ceased to expostulate with his brother, or to induce him to mend his neglectful ways. He supposed, when he thought about it at all, that till the end of his life he would continue to serve and provide for his mother and his brother. He was their provider, their protector, their victim, their master, and their slave; that was his function, and he did not complain against it. A servant he would not get, even could he have paid the wages ten times over, because of the tattle carried to the village. He saw, then, in the simplicity of his mind, no other course open to him than to perform all the duties himself.

He set aside upon a tray a cup of tea, when he had made it, and a bowl of gruel for the bed-ridden old woman upstairs. This he gave to Olver, telling him to carry it up carefully, and stood himself at the foot of the stairs holding up the candle for a light. He heard the door open above, and his mother's querulous voice. He smiled grimly to himself as he thought of how long she had been waiting for her tea, and of what she would have said could she have known the cause, and have seen the two figures of himself and Clare standing in the sunlight on the Downs. This radiant vision of Clare crossed his heart in a flash; it hurt him. *Had* his mother seen them? he never knew himself the true extent of the powers he must not allow himself to think about, because he was afraid of them.



Gipsy Lovel, he knew they called him in the village. . . .

Olver came down again, and still his eyes sought his brother's face to find whether he had been forgiven. His brother's servility and excessive devotion to himself exasperated Nicholas. He sat over his supper tossing bits of food to the dogs, and trying to pretend to himself that Olver with his searching eyes and anxious face was not sitting opposite to him in mute beseeching, hanging on to his looks and gestures. Nicholas despised himself for his churlishness, but tonight his home, his brother, were violently intolerable to him. He could not breathe, he was being stifled; he rose nervously and kicked the logs into a blaze; in the middle of doing this he swung round.

"Why do you follow me so with your gaze?" he asked impatiently.

"You are angry with me, Nicco, for having forgotten the supper, but indeed I thought only of you, and you are all I have in the world."

Lovel said, not unkindly, "Well, you wasted your anxiety: I am better able than most to look after myself. I am not angry any more," but in spite of his words he still felt that the house oppressed him, and that a restlessness, usually kept under control, was gnawing at him. He knew well whom to blame: it was Clare, who appeared to him the personification of all he had abjured. He had had Clare for two hours before his eyes, the sight of her stirring him as the

wind stirs a bell, and now in the place of Clare he was returned to the monotony of his sad home; in the full determination not to think of Clare he crossed over to the fire where his dogs already lay sleeping, filled his pipe and lighted it, and forthwith began to dream of nothing but Clare as he sat gazing into the heart of the red ashes.

She was so little known to him; he liked to picture,—yet his bashfulness made of it a fearful pleasure,—the ordering of her room, of her clothes laid neatly in drawers; he thought of her ribbons; he knew that in the evenings she discarded her gauntlets and her cap and wore soft coloured silks—he had heard Martha Sparrow say so. He had never seen her in these; was never likely so to see her; he trembled at the thrill of so seeing her: her arms would be bare, her throat rounded and white, with red corals up it. Yet he was not sure that he desired to see her thus, save as an experience, for thus the difference between them would be most emphasised; when he met her upon the Downs, and their ponies fell into step side by side, then she was at her closest to him, seeing the heavens and the hills with the same eye, knowing the same things as he knew, reading the signs of the weather, picking up the same landmarks familiar to them both; but such was the tremulousness of his mind that he wavered between the preference of knowing her at her closest, or at her most remote: the one caressed him infinitely, but the other mystified and tempted him, and

made his pleasure into a rapturous pain. What hope had he of ever beholding in the flesh that wraith which his fancy evoked? he, Lovel, sitting over the fire with his two rough dogs and his mazed brother, and at the end of a day's shepherding, while she dined at the Manor House with her father in the warmth of lamplight and the quiet dignity of pervading scholarship? She was gracious enough to him when they met on the hills; there, the closeness of their age and pursuits made them forgetful of their other disparities; the same rain made them both wet, the same wind ruffled their hair; but with her nod of farewell, kindly though it might be, they were instantly severed: he sank, she rose, and drifted out of his reach. He was indignant that an accident of fortune should be the mean occasion of parting them, an accident of fortune, not of birth, for by lineage the Lovels, although so fallen, had, in the pride of their Egyptian blood, no comparison to fear. Then he remembered that a deeper irony kept him apart from any woman. He had before him constantly the sight of his mother and brother to uphold him in the resolution that with the three of them the race must end. Such blood must not be carried on. But because the primitive instincts were deep and intractable in him, the renunciation roused his anger; his animal birthright was to beget sons, and he rebelled against the chance that cheated him of it; and in the same train of thought came the image, whose lovely audacity

appalled even while it enraptured him, of his children and Clare's; he saw their strong limbs and heard their laughter, an image vivid and actual, and—he swore to himself—of a wholesome inspiration. He must see and think no more of Clare! But as he came to this conclusion, Olver, who had been squatting on the opposite side of the hearth, stirring the ashes and shooting furtive glances from time to time at his brother, said, "There came for you a message while you were away, from Mr. Warrener, to know would you go up to the Manor House to-morrow, to fix shelves for his books. William Baskett came with the message, and says, Mr. Warrener is impatient, and though the books have been stacked up on the floor for over a year, must needs have the shelves ready to-morrow now that he had at last taken the idea into his head."

"I cannot go," said Lovel moodily.

He gave no reason. He thought that the effort was being made unnecessarily hard for him by this chance intervention. True, he might not set eyes on Clare, but even so the Manor House would be so redolent of her as to trouble him to the soul. She might be absent; but, again, she might come into the room and stand over him while he sawed and planed, chattering to him in her fashion, at once grave and light-hearted. "I cannot go," he said, afraid for himself.

Olver shuffled across the hearth and knelt at his brother's feet, looking up into his face.

"There is a weight on your mind, brother. Oh, yes, no use in shaking your head: I always know. Won't you tell Olver? You don't know what powers I might have to help you,—no, no, nothing that you disapprove of," he added hastily, seeing Lovel's face darken, "but you know, you often say I've a kink of wisdom, and so I have," he went on, carried away, as he readily was, by his vanity. "Only you cannot appreciate it, brother, or you would trust me more."

Lovel would have given much to be left in peace just then in order to pursue his quarrel with his own heart, but he was incapable of slighting his brother's demonstrations of affection, so he put his hand on the head pressed against his knee, and, without speaking, caressed the curls in a manner he hoped was not too obviously perfunctory. He felt Olver's instant yielding under the caress, and the creature's pathetic dependence only increased his melancholy. "It costs me so little, and means so much to him," he thought, and continued to soothe Olver's temples with the tips of his fingers.

They sat in silence for some time, a silence disturbed only by the sigh of a tired dog in his sleep, or by the falling apart and flaring of a log. Presently Olver said, in a meditative tone, without moving, "You hated me, Nicco, when you first came in and I asked you where you had been. Yet I have often asked you that, and you have not been angry."

"You knew where I had been: driving sheep

for Mr. Morland," replied Lovel mechanically.

"Yes,—and meeting Miss Warrener." Olver gave a great chuckle. "Oh, yes, I know," he continued, "because the first time I went down the road to see whether you were coming I met Miss Warrener, riding on her pony, and she stopped to ask me how I did, and said that she had seen you. She carried a bunch of gorse slung at her saddle, which she said you had cut for her. Is that how the land lies, brother?"

"No, no,—simple boy,—never hint such a thing." Lovel was angry, and extraordinarily distressed.

"*I* know," said Olver, nodding sagely. He rambled on, "Daisy Morland has seen you together, and because she wants you for herself her eyes are sharpened. I found her in Farmer Morland's barn, cutting mangolds for the cattle. She asked me to help her. Very soon I was cutting mangolds alone, and she was lying in the hay watching me. She said, 'That brother of yours is a sly dog,—hoity, toity with us poor girls,—too good to speak to a Christian,—and all because he fries other fish in secret.' I asked her what she meant. She tossed her head and said it was not for her to give away your secrets to me. So I stopped cutting, and threw her down on her back in the hay, and tickled her till she promised she would tell me. She was soft to tickle; she squealed and wriggled about. Why don't you like her?" asked Olver.

"Go on," Nicholas answered.



"Then she said she had been hiding behind a rick somewhere up near the Grey Wethers, and she had seen you come riding along with Miss Warrener. She said you got off your horses when you came to the Wethers, and sat down on one of the stones, and stayed there till the sun began to sink; then you caught your horses and rode away, very close together. She said you had talked all the time as though a week was too little for all you had to say. She said she had seen you both at Marlborough market, too. Then she began to cry; she cried so loud I was afraid Farmer Morland would come in to see what was ado, so I held my hand over her mouth until she stopped. She said you were breaking her heart, and she cared nothing what became of her. She said she was reckless. What's the meaning of it all?"

"Jealousy," said Lovel, with suppressed fury.

Olver said nothing, but his conviction remained sagely the same. He was sorry he dared not tell Nicholas the rest of the story, but Nicholas was inexpressibly severe and prudish; he would not have approved of the scenes in the barn, neither of the knock-about scene of tickling and squealing amongst the hay, nor of the subsequent scene, when Olver had laid his hand over Daisy's mouth, and, half-strangled, she had spluttered against his hand, and the wetness of her mouth had mingled with the wetness of her tears to inflame his rustic senses, and in the indifference to her misery she had not resisted him.

He smiled to himself as he remembered, but he knew better than to tell this to Nicholas. Only once had he seen Nicholas really violent, on one occasion when he had come artlessly to his brother with the tale of his first exploit; Nicholas' explosion of anger was a thing Olver had never forgotten. It remained lurking, a thing which at any moment might flare up again. He kept such stories now for his mother's ear alone; the old woman, enchanted at this surreptitious alliance against Nicholas' hateful authority, would cackle in sympathy, and, making her hand a trumpet to her ear, invite Olver to pour out in a whisper details increasingly succulent, and so passed hours, Olver with an eye constantly on the door, lest Nicholas should unexpectedly return, but turning always again to whisper to his mother, who with her "Hee! hee! and did you so? good lad!" and similar ejaculations, would puff him up to thinking himself a man where he was most an animal. Lovel was thinking only of how he might best delude his brother's shrewdness, and how discover whether the girl was scattering this gossip broadcast over the village. He had always disliked the girl,—her red hair, pale blue eyes, loose mouth, and freckles,—nor was it likely that he would turn to civility now in order to coax her into discretion. He was inexpressibly concerned, perplexed and discouraged, and the longer did he remain brooding over the fire, the more convinced did Olver grow that Daisy's hysterical theory was the true one.

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They heard the rapping of their mother's stick on the floor overhead; it was the signal that she needed something. The dogs raised their heads and began to growl. Lovel, wrenched back to the actualities of his daily life, said, "Go, you, Olver."

He sat on after Olver had gone, but he was not allowed to pursue his reflections, for the sounds of violent quarrelling reached him from overhead: his mother's voice raised to a scream, and Olver's to an indignant bellow. He knew that he must go up and separate them. The cause of their quarrels never transpired; the outburst was puerile, violent, and senseless, and came to an end with the same childish suddenness as it had begun. Lovel never knew which he dreaded most, and which most filled him with anxiety and distaste: their alliance or their hostility.

He rose, and taking the candle he went upstairs to his mother's room. He went with an extreme weariness and repugnance, feeling that the burden he had to carry was too heavy when private sorrow was added to it, and wishing for once, strong though he was, that he might lay it down and be seen no more in that country. The sound of the quarrelling voices continued as he made his way along the upstairs passage, but they fell into an abrupt silence in the presence of his authority. He stood in the doorway and they looked at him guiltily. The old woman, huddled in her chair, muttered something under

her breath. He took in the squalid disorder of the badly-lighted room.

“Go down to the kitchen, Olver,” he said.

Olver slunk away. Lovel came forward, and patiently began setting the room to rights; although he was too practical a man to indulge himself in the fastidiousness which might have been his by nature, he was often sickened by the loathsomeness of the many tasks he had to perform for his mother: he was sickened now. She was utterly without regard for decency; but for her son, she would have wallowed contentedly in the squalor of her room; it was amazing to him how, helpless though she was, and able to travel about only by propelling herself in her wheeled chair, she yet contrived during his short absences to reduce the room she inhabited to the appearance of a hovel.

“Can Olver not fetch away your supper, but you must start quarrelling with the lad?” he said.

Immediately she broke into a torrent of grievances, in the high, shrill voice of her petulance, which Lovel knew so well; and he regretted that he had not let the matter pass uncommented, since it was irremediable. He waited until she had finished, then bent over and said with his usual gentleness, “Come, mother, let me help you to bed.”

She allowed him to raise her from her chair, first throwing back the old miscellaneous shawls and coverings, and, half lifting, half carrying her across the room, he deposited her on her bed.

She kept up meanwhile a continual grumble: where had he been all day, that he had so neglected her? Since early morning he had not been near her; she had been dependent upon Olver for her food and her company; but Olver was a good lad; he did not go off all day like Nicholas did, wenching, no doubt,—Nicholas pressed his hands tightly together, to keep himself silent,—Olver had sat with her that afternoon, and they had talked; where would she be, without Olver for company?

During this complaining and muttering Lovel had busied himself with making her comfortable in bed; he covered her over, arranged her pillow for her, placed a glass of water within her reach,—she always wanted matches too, but was not allowed them;—he now looked down upon her as she lay, her helpless form under the shapeless heap of bedclothes and her scant grey locks straggling over the pillow. She had the same eyes as her sons, in what must have been a fine bony face; and the same cunning look frequently stole into them as stole into Olver's.

"I hope you have not again been filling the lad's head with the rubbish I have so often forbidden," said Lovel anxiously in reply to her last remark.

"A nice way for you to speak to your mother!" she croaked. "Olver doesn't speak so to me; forbidden, indeed! Never you mind what Olver and I have been saying. If I had only been given Olver to myself I could have made him

into something better than a mere simpleton, as you all dub him; but no, I wasn't to have Olver to myself: there was always Nicholas between us, with his 'forbidden' . . . forbidden . . . Anyhow, Nicholas hasn't won altogether," she muttered, not quite daring to speak too distinctly; "there are hours every day when Nicholas isn't at home."

"I can always get Olver to tell me the truth," said Lovel, "and if I find you have been at your tricks I shall have to keep him away from your room."

The old woman laughed; a grating and unpleasant laugh, between fear and amusement.

"And to do that you will have to stay at home, and then where will the money come from, my pretty boy?"

"True," said Lovel, "I am obliged to go out to work to make money for you and Olver, but Olver can come with me, and so he shall."

"And leave me alone here to die, if so be," said the old woman, beginning to whimper, and she snuffled into her bed-clothes, and said that Nicholas was a cruel son to her.

"The remedy lies with you," he said quietly; and then, straightening the clothes for her again, he told her that he would not take Olver away from her unless she obliged him to. "But I am responsible for Olver," he added, "and we are ill enough looked upon in the village already; you know, mother, that I must keep Olver in order, and his brain is too weak to be trusted



with dangerous matter." He wondered why he took the trouble to say this, since he knew that it was useless attempting to appeal to the old woman's good sense or better feelings, as she had neither.

She only laughed again. He paused beside her for a moment, but there was nothing more to say, and wishing her good-night he took up the candle and left the room. Out in the passage he heard her voice calling him back.

"Matches, Nicholas: let me have the matches to-night." He shook his head in refusal. "Cruel to me, Nicholas; and my own son too: cruel and hard; he bullies us both . . ." Lovel shut the door and went downstairs, but the mumble of her complaining pursued him still.

Olver crouched by the fire between the dogs, his curls almost as matted as their pelt. He eyed his brother from under his brows, as though he expected to be scolded. Lovel however only said quietly, "I shall remain at home to-morrow, and if you choose you can go to the Manor House for me." He let fall this remark in the midst of his occupation of clearing the room before going to bed; he let it fall so casually that no trace appeared of the effort it cost him. "But if you should see Miss Warrener," he added, "you must breathe no word of the folly you uttered to me. I must have your word on that, you have never yet broken your word to me."

"I will not tell Miss Warrener," said Olver.

Lovel was satisfied.

Olver set out early on the following morning, carrying his basket of tools slung on his back, and a number of clean new planks, smelling of resin, under his arm. Nicholas stood at the door to watch him go, envious, regretful, but sturdy in his determination. Olver walked quickly up the village street; the morning was bright; he felt good and competent this morning, and full of importance: not only had Nicholas trusted him to do his work, but he was full of a private intention to spy out the land at the Manor House; if Nicholas wanted Clare, why, then Nicholas must have what he wanted; it seemed to Olver quite simple and direct. He turned in at the gates of the Manor House, pleased by the pretty garden and the cool house with its long windows and open shutters. The lowering mood which was usual to him receded further and further; it was pleasant to feel so good; he looked all round him as he walked, smiling. The door was opened to him by Martha Sparrow in a clean cap and apron; he wanted to kiss her soft old face, which looked as though it smelt of soap, but instead of doing that he pulled off his cap very civilly and said that he had come to fix the bookshelves since his brother was unable. Martha Sparrow looked at his tight curls and thought with surprise that he was an agreeable-looking lad; telling him to wait a moment, she left him on the doorstep and went to Mr. Warrener. "Young Lovel, sir," she said, "have sent the zany in his stead."

Mr. Warrener had forgotten all about the book-shelves; he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and stared at Martha.

"Sent the zany, Martha? What for?"

Martha respectfully and patiently reminded him.

"To be sure, to be sure." He turned and surveyed with a helpless resentment the books piled up in a corner of his room. "Bring him in, Martha," he said, resignedly.

"You'll have him in the room, sir, then?" said Martha dubiously.

"Why not? why not? to be sure, he has to put up the shelves," replied Mr. Warrener, scenting disapproval.

"These gipsies, sir . . . and the zany as naughty as a magpie?"

"I'll stop with him, Martha," said Mr. Warrener, who before the rebuke of his old servant instantly became a great coward.

He could not, however, endure the noise of sawing and nailing which began as soon as Olver had spread out his dust-sheet on the floor, but took his bee-hive hat and stole quietly away from the room. He greatly preferred that Olver should do the work wrong, or even that he should pilfer in the room, than that he should himself have to remain at hand to supervise or to furnish any further directions. He therefore retreated to a bench at the remotest corner of the garden, hoping that Martha would not detect him, where, taking his book from his pocket, he gave himself

up to his interrupted reading, to the pleasant accompaniment of the bees busy in the limes, and of the distant small noises of a summer day. He had soon forgotten Martha's remonstrance, and vaguely relied as usual on Clare guessing his wishes, as indeed she always seemed to do, and seeing to it on his behalf that Olver Lovel made no impossible mistake over the shelves.

Before Olver had been at work very long he became aware that Mr. Warrener was no longer in the room. He sat back on his heels and examined his surroundings. The soft carpet and deep chairs especially took his fancy, and he was much impressed by the spacious writing table littered with so many papers, and the number of reference books, held open at a special page by various incongruous objects, this one by a piece of flint, that one by a ruler, and yet a third by the shoe-horn brought down from Mr. Warrener's dressing-table. Olver rose to his feet, and tip-toed about, looking at the books and at the specimens of pottery, bones, arrow-heads, and what not, in the show cases which composed Mr. Warrener's little museum. Arrived at the chimney piece he came to a pause, for here he discovered an object which pleased him more than anything he had ever seen, namely a small circular mirror, mounted on a handle, which by reason of its convexity had the property of reflecting everything in a slight distortion,—small, brilliant, precise and peculiar. He was so fascinated by this toy that he ventured to pick it

up; first he looked at his own face in it, and laughed childishly to see the widened cheekbones, the slanting and Puckish eyes; then he turned it this way and that, to make it reflect different corners of the room; and finally he got a tiny picture of the garden in it, seen through the windows, with a miniature Mr. Warrener sitting on a bench, slightly out of focus, in the background. So absorbed was he that he did not notice the entrance of Clare; she came in, wearing a dress of sprigged muslin, and swinging her hat by its ribbons from her hand, and she entered with just that degree of nonchalance which would have led a shrewd observer to the certainty that she expected to find in the room some person other than the person she actually found. So it was that they both appeared, and Olver gaped at her, very much taken aback at being discovered on the side of the room opposite to his work, and with the mirror in his hand.

"Why, I understand Martha to say that Lovel was here," Clare said inconsequently.

Olver seemed to find no reply; he stood, holding the mirror, and scrutinizing Clare as though he beheld an unbelievable vision, and yet wished to be certain of recollecting that vision in every detail. In the diversion of the mirror he had momentarily forgotten not only his work, but also the ulterior motive for which he had come. He now remembered both. So this was the lass that Nicco wanted! Olver, envisaging such de-

sires with the utmost crudeness, was not in the least surprised. He would not have cared for the lass himself,—she was too limber of build for him,—but he could see her very well as the complement of Nicco, his swarthiness and her fairness side by side.

“He could not come; I am here for him,” he replied at last, thinking himself very artful for saying “he could not” instead of “he would not.”

“Was he busy?” asked Clare.

“No,” said Olver heedlessly, for he was now thinking of the mirror and wondering how he could dispose of it before she should observe it in his hand, “he has stayed at home.”

“Oh,” said Clare. She saw the mirror. “Why, what are you doing with that?” she asked, amused, and she looked brightly and interrogatively at him.

Seeing that she was not angry, he gave a shy smile and looked into the mirror once again, laughing delightedly at the little picture of his own face, and glancing at Clare.

“Do you like it? you may have it for your own if you like,” she said, partly because he was simple, and partly because he was her friend Lovel’s brother, and she knew that he would show it to Lovel.

“For my own? But can you give it to me?” said Olver, clasping his treasure and grinning.

“Yes, it is mine, so I can give it to you. Would you like it?”

“But this is Mr. Warrener’s room.”



"Yes, but the mirror is mine for all that—*was* mine, I should say, since it is yours now."

"Really and truly mine? to take home with me? to break if I like?"

"Really and truly yours; but you must try not to break it: a broken mirror brings bad luck on a house."

"There is bad luck enough on our house already without that," said Olver, suddenly gloomy.

"Bad luck,—how do you mean?"

"I don't know; Nicco says so sometimes, when he has a black fit on him."

"Nicco?"

"My brother."

It was a little shock to her to find that Lovel, whom she knew only as a figure so detached and self-reliant, should own a childish name. It seemed to make him suddenly human; her eyes softened.

"Does he often have a black fit on him?" she pursued, but as soon as she had spoken the words her loyalty repented of them, and she said, "No, you should not tell me."

"There is no harm," said Olver, thinking that he saw a chance to interest her; and he went on, steering away from direct allusion to his brother until he should see a chance to draw round again insensibly to that subject. "My mother says always that our house is unlucky, and, according to her interpretation, 'tis because of the stones that built it,—sacrificial stones, you know

they be, Miss Warrener, angered at the desecration. So says my mother, and she should know, seeing that her mother was hanged for a witch, as is common talk hereabouts, and for once the common talk is true. But for my part I have never been able to see that our house was unlucky; we have enough to eat, and a fire to warm ourselves by, though, indeed," he added, as though the idea had but just now occurred to him, "that is thanks to my brother, and I do not know how my mother and myself would fare but for him,—hee! hee!"

Clare was far too honest to wish to play the spy upon Lovel, yet she was so much impressed by this suggestion of the half-wit youth and his bedridden mother being left to their own devices, and feeling moreover that the most scrupulous conscience could not accuse her of spying upon Lovel when she was to hear something to his credit, that she did not forbear from encouraging Olver, "I have heard that his devotion to you both was extreme."

Olver needed no encouragement.

"Without him, I should die. It is true that sometimes he is stern, and he sits staring into the fire, and I can get no word from him, but I have learnt that at those times he is unhappy. But he is so gentle, Miss Warrener, you would not believe; at one moment he will seem withdrawn and angry, and the next moment he is all pity. He gives his life up to us; he does not say so, but I know he does. Once when I was a

child the village boys threw stones at me, as they might at a dog, but Nicholas he came and beat them all with his fists and carried me home in his arms, and never left me till I was mended."

"He has a great affection for you," said Clare, not knowing what to say.

"Oh no,—that is quite impossible," Olver replied naïvely, surprised at the suggestion.

Clare was touched by his humility, so obviously genuine. It seemed to him, indeed impossible that the demi-god who in his eyes was Lovel, should stoop to any feelings other than pity and obligation towards a poor contemptible burden like himself. Clare began to catch the infection of this idealisation of Lovel; she saw him through Olver's eyes: humane where he need only have been conscientious; generous where he need only have been just; yet preserving always that aloofness and detachment which safeguarded him from all true contact with sordid things. When she had met him on the highway, or on the Downs, she had not wondered much about the background of his life; she had accepted him as an isolated and romantic figure, organic with the Downs themselves; to her, he was the rider on the skyline, the shepherd of the folds.

"There's a girl in the village would give five years of life for a kind word from Nicholas," Olver pursued, considering himself meanwhile in his mirror with an air of great detachment, "but Nicholas has no eye for girls. Oh, see,"

he broke off, pointing at the mirror, "my face is like seen in water,—stretched wide. I often saw it so in a spoon, but I never dreamt of so pretty a toy as this. Has it magical properties, do you think? It should have, to match its freakishness. Could I look into it, do you think, in the moonlight, and see the picture, all pale, of what you were doing, Miss Warrener, in the face of the mirror, round like another little moon itself?"

Clare was startled by his outburst, and the laughter that accompanied it. Until then she had almost forgotten that he was reputed mad.

"I'll ask my mother," he added, forgetting his prudence in his excitement. "Nicco does not like my learning of her, so we have to whisper it when he is away from the house, and you could not believe the things she tells me. And shows me, too. Why, I can make an object travel towards me, without touching it; and I have seen visions in a pool of water. It is our secret. Shall I show you? Watch the curtains: I will make them belly out, though no wind blows them."

"No . . ." said Clare, stretching out her hand. "If you love your brother as you appear to," she said rapidly, "don't do what he disapproves; don't, Olver Lovel. I am sure he is right to disapprove; I am sure he is wise. Respect him. I am sure he deserves your respect."

She spoke with energy. "Why?" said Olver suspiciously. "Do you know anything of such

things? Would you not like to see the curtains move towards me? My mother says, that with a hair from the head of a person, she could bring that person, willy-nilly, to her. She has tried it with Nicholas, but she could not bring him. He is too strong. He is so strong, that, if he gave his mind to it, he could bring any one; yes, Miss Warrener, he could bring you. He could bring you to him on the Downs, at midnight or when he would."

"For pity's sake, Olver Lovel!" cried Clare. He came close up to her.

"Don't fear my brother, Miss Warrener. There are powers in our family,—but he does not practise them. I think he does not believe. He is scornful,—and busy. Oh, he is a fool; that girl I was telling you of, he turns away from her and half a dozen more. A dandy lad, they say, and are angry. But that is not the reason. I could tell you the reason, if I would. But I shan't. No, Miss Warrener, I keep my counsel."

He leered at her. "Give me your hand," he said, catching it, "and I will show you something."

"No," said Clare, trying to draw it away. "Look at your bookshelves," she added, to distract his ideas, "you are leaving them unfinished, and my father will be in presently, to ask why they are not done. If he takes it into his head to be annoyed, he will complain to your brother."

"Nicholas won't listen to complaints about

me," Olver returned loftily. "He may curse me within our own doors, but no one from outside may say a word against me. If Mr. Warrener complains, he will only tell him not to employ me again. We don't care whether we are given work or not, Nicholas and I don't."

"You forget," said Clare, "that my father sent for your brother and not for you."

"Ah, but he wouldn't come, would he?" said Olver, highly amused. She was relieved to see that he had got out of his sinister mood and was again prepared to laugh and be childish. "You don't know, because you didn't see him, Miss Warrener, how he sat glowering at the fire last night, and ended by telling me that I could come here in his place. You don't see him at nights, when he comes home tired and has to be patient with our mother. He's patient with her, yes; but he'd get on better if he humoured her more: he's too unbending."

"How shrewd you are, Olver," Clare was surprised into saying.

"Hoi, hoi," said Olver, wagging his head. "I know my Nicholas; he'll break sooner than bend. I told him he could come, and take the chance of not meeting—the person he didn't want to meet; but he wouldn't have that, not he. He's stayed at home, to dig in the garden. Time and again, he takes a day or an afternoon off to do that, for he's mighty fond of the garden, and that's queer, seeing that his days are spent on the bare Downs, whether or not his business sends him



there, where nothing grew that I ever saw, but sorrel and poor grasses."

Clare wondered how she could best end the conversation, in which Olver hovered evidently around some topic he might not broach, but she did not forbear from smiling when he mentioned Lovel in his garden; she had often seen the garden at the end of the long, tunnel-like passage as she turned down the village street; and the little picture of Lovel's affection for it was like discovering a patch of sun in a thunderous landscape. Olver meanwhile had turned back to his planks and tools; he was fingering the latter; the little round mirror he had put carefully into his pocket. "I am a good carpenter, you know, Miss Warrener," he said, as though he were letting her into a secret, and she saw that his attention had changed its object.

Nevertheless she wondered greatly at Lovel's refusal to do work at the Manor House. She wondered whether she had inadvertently offended him, but could recall nothing; their last meeting had been as friendly as ever, nor had his manner in any way betrayed anything amiss. He was, however, so strange and fiery a creature, so unaccountable in his moods, that some chance word of hers might well have rankled, grown during the night, and borne fruit upon the following day. She went carefully in her mind over their recent conversations, which, happily inconsequent and spasmodic, were a little diffi-

cult to recollect in detail; but she achieved this feat, smiling again with a little heartache over Lovel's remarks about children,—ah, what a good friendship it had been!—but her sifting of their talks revealed nothing. She went about the house, still wondering after Lovel. What if she had imagined the whole thing? What if he had been genuinely prevented? the hints that Olver had let drop might well be the progeny only of that sickly brain. Revived by this idea, yet apprehensive of its allusion, she sought out William Baskett and sent him off to Lovel with a message. "Say to him, William, that I have a small repair to be done to the cupboard in my room, and beg him to come with his bag of tools as quickly as may be. Say that it is a neat job I require or I would not otherwise disturb him. Say that it is in my room, and for my own particular use."

A quarter of an hour later William returned: Lovel must ask Miss Warrener to excuse him, he was busy and could not come.

At that Clare flamed into anger. What! she held out an olive branch to the man, over some imaginary affront, and he rejected it? Very well. Let him nurse his grievance; he should not be given another chance. She was all the angrier with him because she was angry with herself for having sent a verbal message by Baskett; the story, conceivably, would be repeated at the Waggon of Hay, in which case it would be all over the village; she ought to have written

Lovel a note. The whole of her day was spoilt by her resentment; it pricked her constantly through all her occupations; she dared not go outside the gates for fear of meeting the offender; she hated him for thus disturbing her peace of mind and inconveniencing her movements. One thing at least was clear by now, that he was deliberately avoiding her. He should not have cause to complain that she sought him out.

But by the next day her mood was already softened and her conscience again at work. She was sorry to think that she might, however unintentionally, have hurt him so deeply. Poor Lovel! his position and his family made her oversensitive. She would not willingly add to his burden. Perhaps he was already regretting a too hasty refusal. But how to approach him as it were by chance? for she felt she would sooner lose his friendship altogether than send a second message to his house. There was one very obvious course open to her: she took her pony and rode up to the Downs.

But although she rode up to the White Horse, and down again to the Grey Wethers, and round by Lovel's hut, and skirted most of the valleys where there was likely shelter and pasture for sheep, she saw no sign of Lovel. She was again angry with him for not being there, nor did the fact that he followed many trades besides that of a shepherd do anything to soothe her annoyance. She came back, entering the village on

the farther side to avoid passing his house. She felt as though something whose value she had never realised while she still possessed it, had gone out of her life; and here again she found cause for anger with Lovel.

But she could not remain angry with him for very long together. She wondered what he was doing; whether he missed her as much as she missed him; whether his mood had passed by now into a sulky childish obstinacy that was determined not to make the first advance, but that, if it were dragged out of its corner, could be willing enough to be coaxed into making friends. Clare smiled fondly as she thought how well she knew him. She thought that she had only to meet him face to face for laughter to spring into his eyes,—laughter both at the relief of their reconciliation, and at himself for his past foolishness.

In the meantime she fell to dwelling upon his occupations, and recalling all the gossip she had ever heard on his account, the stories of his skill, and of his almost miraculous cures performed upon ailing animals; of his breaking-in colts in record time; of his more illicit career as a poacher. There was something in her which enjoyed this train of thought and the pictures it evoked. She liked to think of Lovel moving as stealthy as a cat through the woods at midnight, a snare in his hand and a game-bag across his back. She liked to think of him thus alone with the woods, the night, and the slinking animals, his foot cautious upon the leaves; she thought that

he must be happy thus. She even liked to think of him bending over his victim, and of the warm, smoking blood spurted over his hands. Although he hunted them, he had a kinship with the animals. When he crouched, motionless as a hare, at the approach of a keeper, he, the hunter, was suddenly on the animals' side more truly than the keeper, who was there to protect them. There was something ridiculous in the idea of a keeper protecting the animals against Lovel; even the rabbit squealing in the noose must know that only by chance was Lovel out for its capture,—an enemy of superior force, merely, rather than anything so utterly removed as a man.

All this dwelling upon Lovel, which sent her absent-minded about the house and garden, did not bring her any nearer to making her peace with him. She was now no longer angry, but sore and puzzled, and she was sure that he must be unhappy too, although she knew that even after their reconciliation,—ultimately inevitable, to her mind,—he would never own to this. The necessity of this reconciliation seemed to her so simple and so obvious that she never thought of questioning her pride. Daily she rode upon the Down, and daily as she returned disappointed she contemplated in greater detail the possibility of sending, after all, a second message to Lovel. She could even send it in her father's name. But he would not come. She was convinced he would not come. That was not the

method to adopt. She must take him by surprise; she must startle him; appear suddenly before him, so that he would smile before he had time to remember his grievance, and, having once smiled, it would be too late to resume a severe face.

In the midst of this pre-occupation, she almost forgot Calladine, that theatrical man, and the excitability of his manner recently towards her. She had not seen him again, for which she was thankful; she could not have met him without embarrassment. The idea of marriage was incongruous and slightly absurd. She belonged to herself, and to herself only; and the suggestion that Calladine or any one else should wish to capture her was not serious but merely laughable. It had not occurred to her that he, as well as Lovel, might be unhappy on her account; such a thought would have distressed her exceedingly. It was entirely without thought of Calladine, save for an occasional fleeting hope that he might not have chosen to ride in the direction as herself, that she roved over the Downs in search of Lovel. A fortnight passed before she found him. She could, doubtless, have met him long before by simply walking down the village street, but that would not have been at all to her purpose, and she had in fact been at pains to avoid any such encounter. At the end of a fortnight, having ridden up to the White Horse, from where the widest view was to be obtained, she discerned a long way off, up by the clump of



beeches on the horizon, a flock of sheep accompanied by a shepherd. Unhesitatingly, even gaily, she started off in his pursuit. She was happy to think that their long estrangement was drawing to its end. She skipped in her mind over the preliminaries which must be got over before they could take up their friendship again on its old easy terms. She, with a mind impatient of all but essentials, would preferably have dispensed with these preliminaries, explanations, upbraidings, and possibly abuse. She wanted to waste no time; there were so many things she wanted to tell him; she wanted to tell him how her pony had gone lame from picking up a stone in his shoe; she wanted to tell him again of the melancholy effect produced upon her by her visit to Starvecrow; she wanted to ask him to splice her trout-rod and come with her one evening down to the quiet pool of the brook. Her eagerness grew with the seething of these small schemes as she urged her pony across the grass. She was approaching Lovel by a devious way, going down into the valleys, where she would escape his notice, until she could strike directly up the hill and top the crest suddenly before his eyes. Her own eyes sparkled over the precautions she was taking. She thought that she had now gone far enough along the low reaches of the valleys, and set her pony at the hill; they mounted the long, steep incline, like going upon an adventure.

On the breeze came the tinkling of the sheep-bells, as the flock moved cropping.

She had calculated her distance well, for when she finally reached the top of the hill, she found that she had exactly hit off the flock of sheep cropping beside the clump of beeches. Close by them lay a bundle of osiers, hastily thrown down, and several wattled hurdles, with fresh osiers threaded into them for repair; a knife, the sun shining on its strong, curved blade; and a small bundle tied up in a red pocket handkerchief. There were all these signs of the recent presence of the shepherd, but he himself was nowhere to be seen. Clare looked round in perplexity. The sun was strong, the breeze fresh, the grasses glittered and curtsied, the shadows of the clouds bowled down the hills and ran up the opposite side, the view was broad, but it revealed no Lovel. With all that open country lying spread out, he must have taken refuge in the small beech-wood,—watching her, perhaps, from behind the trunk of a tree. She was almost amused by this childish game of hide and seek, and in any case was determined not to be baffled by him now that she had come so far; she could not now turn and ride away in acknowledgment of defeat. Swinging herself off her pony she knotted the reins loosely and let it turn away to snuff the grass, while she herself entered the little wood, brave though tremulous, her optimism ebbing as her obstinacy increased. The tree-trunks were not very close together, so that she could look through the clump from one side out to the other; she often went into these clumps of

beech, and lay down on the bare ground, looking up the smooth grey trunks, watching the sun glint its shivered rays through the branches, and listening to the wind among the leaves; she had even been into them with Lovel, and he had knocked the warts off the trunks and carved them into frightening faces with his knife to amuse her.

She paused with her hand upon the tree. "Lovel!" she cried. "I know you are here, don't hide from me; come out, Lovel!" There was no answer, and after a little hesitation she went deeper into the wood. She saw him then; he was not hiding, he was standing there perfectly motionless, in the midst of a small clearing in the trees, standing very quiet, like a man who after a long pursuit sees himself finally brought to bay. He was looking straight at her, as though he knew the direction in which she would come.

Now that she was confronted with him, a little of her self-confidence went; he had, for a long fortnight now, inhabited her mind only, and her vision not at all; and in her mind their meeting had run always on the lines she devised for it, but here she had Lovel himself of untested inflexibility, to trip the running of her programme. She gazed at him beseechingly, but he still stood, in an attitude of expectant resignation, waiting for her to open the attack. It came into her mind that even now she might turn away, without a word spoken, having learnt all that there was to be learnt from a single look. Instead,

she went up to him, saying "Lovel?" and upon an impulse she held out her hand.

He remained unmoved, examining her with a sort of abstracted interest. She thought that she had never seen him so much like an animal, pausing even while poised for flight, and a despair overcame her when she remembered her own conceit that she could tame and bring to heel again a creature so wild. She was ashamed when she remembered that she had pitied him, had assumed that he must be unhappy, had smiled to herself when she thought of keeping up his pretence of temper like a sulky child. That smile had had in it much that was tender, much that was maternal; had she then forgotten Lovel, or had her imagination so metamorphosed his image, that she could have persuaded herself of his need for tenderness, tolerance, or pity? He had need for none of those soft things; she had been mistaken in thinking that he in any way needed her; he needed no one; he stood alone. Nevertheless, she would not retreat without some struggle; he might, still, prove to be no worse than angry and hurt; if he insisted on remaining so, it should, at least, not be owing to a lack of good-will on her part. "Lovel," she said, "Lovel, have I offended you in any way? See, I have come here deliberately to ask you and to say that I am sorry for whatever I may have done; how can I say more?"

Still he did not reply, but turned his head slightly and uneasily as though looking for es-

cape. He still had that air of being poised in the clearing of the trees, alienating him from her as if she had come upon him in the midst of some secret rite which he only awaited her departure to resume. She felt inclined to cry out, "We were so close to one another, once!" and the pain of the loss stabbed her sharply, but instead she pleaded again with him, "Lovel, if you would only speak to me we could put this misunderstanding right." Where was the smile she had so confidently hoped to startle into his eyes? He had never shown himself so aloof or so forbidding; she felt herself small, insignificant, and importunate; if she had found him in the open, she thought, he would have been more vulnerable, but here among the trees he seemed curiously protected.

He had not moved a step ever since she came up with him; was he rooted there, a tree himself, or a sapling? she did not know; and a panic began to spread over her at his fancied communion and alliance with nature. He was as brown as the earth, his clothes were the colour of dead leaves, his shirt was red like a robin's breast. She remembered again the tales she had heard of him, and her own fancies that had followed him at the poacher's trade, and this time she was afraid. She wove them together with the ignorant tales of the witchcraft among the Lovels. Could there be any truth in these fantastic notions? a secret of harmony in nature which entitled the initiated to powers inexplicable to

the uninitiated? why did all animals so dread Olver Lovel? so trust to Nicholas? what of her own intuitions? her sudden, reasonless terrors? her mingled love and fear of the sarsen stones and of trees? her constant phrase, uttered half in jest, that some day she would be fetched away? And how was Lovel concerned? what part was he to have in the fetching? If only he were not so brown, brown as earth, lithe as the saplings, his shirt red as a robin's breast; if only his eyes were not constant pilgrims to the horizon.

She turned to leave him; at all costs she must get out of this wood, where she felt the old threat closing in round her, and in which Lovel was so mysteriously implicated. She turned slowly, not to betray her panic, still with the half-hope that he would speak and thereby break her spell. But when he spoke, it only deepened.

"There is no misunderstanding," he said.

She wheeled round again upon him.

"Then why have you so avoided me?" she said passionately. "A fortnight ago we met by the Grey Wethers, we had no quarrel, we parted friends. The next day you were sent for to the Manor House, you would not come, you sent your brother. I sent for you later myself,—a special message. You would not come. I thought I had offended you in some way. Do you know that I have looked for you all over the hills to ask you for your reason? A fortnight I have spent in looking for you."

"I know," he said. "I have seen you."



Her voice died away; she had thrown herself against his defences and bruised herself. Her indignation had made a tiny uproar in the wood without detracting from the calm of the trees or the dignity of Lovel. She made a small gesture of abandonment; her one desire now was to get away. "There is nothing more to be said."

"Set your mind at ease," he observed unexpectedly. "You never offended me. Believe me, you could not do so even if you tried; believe me, you are too sweet and gentle to do such a thing. Put all the blame on to me. I am capricious and wayward, you know; any one in the village will tell you as much and a dozen worse things besides. You must believe them all. You have my word on it that they are all true. But as for blaming yourself, never dream of doing so. Think only that I am not fit for you to associate with, and let me go my way without looking for me any more."

"Is this your only reason?" said Clare.

He hesitated. He was still standing motionless and every moment she felt that he was being farther and farther withdrawn from her.

"No, it is not my only reason," he said at last, "but it is the only one I choose to give to you. It is enough surely. I come of a family with a very ill-name, and I myself would see the inside of a prison over and over again if the guardians of the law were as cute at their work as I, perhaps, am at mine. I think it is sufficient reason."

"Have you robbed, or even murdered, Lovel?" she asked.

"Would you be convinced if I told you that I had?" he replied with idle curiosity. "I have robbed crowded coverts, if you call that robbing, but as for the rest, although I have taken the lives of pheasants and partridges, I have not taken the life of man or made away with the property of any of my employers while it was in my charge."

"Your reason is a very insufficient one," she said, "you are telling me nothing that I did not know already. Will you come outside the trees? I cannot talk to you in here, I feel trapped."

"No," he said, retreating a step. "I came in here to avoid you, but since you have followed me we stay in the place I chose. And my other reason is fully adequate,—oh, fully, fully!" he said with great feeling, "so now leave me, Clare, and think of me as harshly as you can. If you meet me anywhere, pass me by; I ask that of you as earnestly as ever a favour was asked."

"You ask me to pass you by even on the Downs?" she said slowly.

"I do," he replied. He rushed on, not looking at her, "I must not make friends. I want to be alone. You stole my friendship, and I have resented it. Call me ill-mannered, even brutal; call me ungrateful, boorish. I was angry when I saw you riding to-day. It is better that you should know the truth, and it cannot hurt you, coming from me. What am I to you? a

peasant, a gipsy, a Jack-of-all-trades. I have nothing to do with your life or you with mine, so leave me alone,—leave me alone,” he said.

All her pride was lashed alive now; she was utterly astonished, and, in her simplicity, convinced. “I have forced my friendship upon you,” she stammered. “Yes, yes,” said Lovel, driving it home. She stared at him, lovely in her distress. But even in her humiliation she was generous. “Forgive me,” she stammered again. She turned and fled out from amongst the trees, aware,—but not knowing how truly,—that she had left there something which she would never regain. She came out by the osiers, the hurdles, and Lovel’s knife lying upon the ground. The sight of it, in its familiarity, stung tears to her eyes. If he had not wanted her, why had he carved faces from the warts of the beech-trees for her amusement. Why had he tired so suddenly? rebelled so wildly against the slight tie of her friendship? She swung herself on to her pony and galloped away, not seeing where she was going, but only mad to put the greatest possible distance between herself and that wood whence she had escaped indeed, but only with her life.

Calladine meanwhile, who knew nothing of Clare’s friendship with Lovel, and who would have stared had he heard it mentioned, had lived in a torment ever since her visit. She had come and gone again, and he felt as though during her

brief sojourn she had stirred round the sluggish atmosphere of his house with a wand. His eye became more critical as he surveyed his surroundings from her point of view. He tried to imagine what she would say were she to take his house thoroughly in hand, and began to introduce such alterations as he thought she would approve; he rearranged his books, he re-hung his pictures, he ordered patterns from London and had his leather chairs covered with a flowered chintz. His servant Mrs. Quince was at first at a loss to know what had come over her master, but after she and Martha Sparrow had put their heads together they arrived at the obvious conclusion. " 'Tis a woman's house now, Martha,—dimity in the windows, and what do you think? dried rose leaves and spices among the linen!—though as yet there's no woman to live in it." Calladine shut his mind obstinately to the curiosity he knew he must be awaking in Mrs. Quince; he daily informed her of his wishes while inviting no comment, and she, on her part, took advantage of his new mood, and of the good-humour in which, she argued, he must be anxious to keep her, to ask for an extra pair of hands for all the new work she pretended he was creating. "There's that girl of Farmer Morland's, sir, casting round for a place." Calladine agreed at once, without argument or enquiry. Let Farmer Morland's girl be engaged by all means; and Daisy, with her red head, her freckles, her pale blue eyes, and her frilled Sunday muslins,

was installed in the attic. Calladine, in so far as he noticed her at all, disliked her at sight; she dropped a curtsey to him the first time she met him, and tried to ingratiate him with a smile. But he was too deeply bent upon his own concerns to pay her more than the tribute of a passing distaste. Clare had been to his house, his room had contained Clare, her voice had vibrated through the air he breathed, her hand had rested on his door handle, her foot had trodden his stair. She might come again—but such was his fantasy that he all but dreaded lest the return of her presence should disturb the perfection of his memory. He was almost content, for the moment, that he might remain at Starvecrow, doing her service. A garden, she had said; and he toiled at the obstinate soil till his hands lost their refinement and hardened in the palms, and he smiled to see his broken nails. Mrs. Quince observed him sarcastically from the windows of the house, hands on hips. He had thrown aside his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. “But he’ll need to do away with those silk shirts if he’s to go in for pick and mattock,” she grumbled, between tenderness and scorn. Calladine was indeed an incongruous figure, spare and delicate of build, with his greying hair that gave him a slightly eighteenth century appearance, and his long back bent over the stones and flints of that untilled hillside. He thought, sometimes ruefully, when he stood up to stretch his back and to survey the little progress he had made, that

Clare had set him a harder task than she knew. He began to invest it with characteristically romantic properties. It was like scaling the Hill of Glass, or separating the wheat from the millet, or travelling to the ends of the earth to bring back a jet bottled from the Singing Fountain. If he could transform this strong wilderness to a blowing curtseying garden, might he, having accomplished his task, present himself to claim his prize? And what would she say, she the distant, she the all-unconscious, when she came to inspect the results of his labours? Would she praise? would she deride? he swung his pick again with an unconvinced jeer at himself for the fabric of symbolism he was creating.

"The new mistress'll have nothing to say to my old-fashioned ways," Mrs. Quince observed to Martha, suggesting that it was she herself whom she thus slightly derided. Martha, simple soul, was taken in. "Likely enough, Mrs. Quince, she has a rare eye to the ordering of a house." Mrs. Quince smiled on one side of her face. "She took over from me when she was fifteen," continued Martha in perfect good faith, "and I wasn't able to call my dusters my own. Look what she has made Mr. Calladine do already; the house isn't the gloomy place it was."

"What he has done was Mr. Calladine's own choice," said Mrs. Quince tartly.

"But you may be sure she put him up to it," Martha replied.

So for hours they talked round and round the



central subject, avoiding always the crux of the discussion, which was that Martha, with the match-making instinct, longed for the day when she should let Clare pass from her hands as a bride, and that Mrs. Quince, who had governed and mothered Calladine (in so far as so uncomfortable and so unreal a man would allow himself to be mothered) equally dreaded the day when another woman should take over from her the reins of Starvecrow. Calladine himself remarked her altered manner. "Will you be taking your lemon and hot water the same as usual at night, sir?" she asked him, and when in surprise he said, "Why shouldn't I, Mrs. Quince?" she replied in a voice full of vague and sinister suggestion, "Well, I thought as things was so changed, and likely to be more changed in future, that that might be going overboard with the rest."

Because Mrs. Quince could not keep off her idea, which buzzed in her head as tirelessly as a mosquito, in between Martha's visits she began to throw out dark hints to Daisy Morland. Daisy absorbed them with the intelligence she brought to bear only on questions connected with the sexual relationship of any two persons. She was careful not to betray too much of her interest to Mrs. Quince; only a modicum sufficient to keep the housekeeper going; and thus judiciously she was able to give the impression that she took in only about half of what was said, so that Mrs. Quince loosened her tongue

to her more than she ventured to loosen it to Martha Sparrow, and presently, encouraged by Daisy's ejaculations of sympathy and admiration, she fell into the habit of speaking her mind freely as to the vexatious prospect of having a young mistress in the house, "With her notions and her fandangles, upsetting folk that knew their work inside out long before she was born." Daisy echoed the complaint; but inwardly she devoutly favoured the scheme of a marriage between Mr. Calladine and Miss Warrener. A parallel plan was maturing slowly in her brain, that she would turn Mr. Calladine's name to her own advantage. She recalled all too vividly the faces of Miss Warrener and young Lovel as she had seen them upon the Downs, when, as she had expressed it in a bout of jealous despair to Olver, "a week wouldn't have been enough for all they had to say to one another." It was true that she had not seen them touch so much as each other's hands, which seemed remarkable to her ideas, accustomed to the loose, inarticulate, indiscriminate rustic fondling, but this, with a sneer, her instinct working less subtly than it might have worked, she attributed to Miss Clare being "gentry," and to Lovel fancying himself "gentry" too, though every one knew in what poverty he lived, for all his ancestors and his book-reading. But, she reflected, with the satisfaction of reducing even "gentry" to a least common denominator with simple folk like herself, in the end it came to the same thing for

everybody; and there was only one way of begetting children: no amount of gentility was able to refine *that* away! She put it crudely to herself, and grinned. But a thought struck her: what if young Lovel in that high-handed way he had with him, should actually succeed in getting Miss Warrener before Mr. Calladine had spoken? Mr. Calladine was a gentleman,—she couldn't call him a man, no, but a gentleman he certainly was, and she was even a little overawed by his gentility,—who would take a long time in coming to the point; he would dawdle the thing out, just for the sake of tickling his own feelings; she could tell that merely by looking at him. Oh, he might have made up his mind long ago, but that wouldn't prevent him from dallying with a girl, seeing her often, teasing himself and her with doubts, wondering whether he would want her quite so much once he had got her, and preferring to live on the whole, in the uncertainty of courtship. . . . She could see through Mr. Calladine; that was one effect being "gentry" had on people. She had nothing but scorn for men like that. Look at him now, digging up a patch for a garden, and all to please Miss Clare,—Mrs. Quince had said so,—and not as though he had been a poor man digging over his potato-patch against the day when he would have to keep a wife. Lovel wasn't like that; and therein lay both her fear and her respect. She tried to console herself by thinking how preposterous was the idea that

Lovel should ever hope to get Miss Warrener, he, a village boy when all was said and done, with an old bed-ridden witch for a mother and a daft hobgoblin for a brother; but her own feelings for Lovel stepped in to destroy this consolation: wasn't he a proper strong young man, as difficult to catch as a colt turned loose on the Downs, with his wild dark air, enough to touch the fancy of a girl? She couldn't tell herself why she had so set her heart on Lovel, if it wasn't for that air of his,—so set her heart on him that she was ready to take on the zany and the old witch and all, if only she could get him. He had never looked twice at her, for all she had tried hard enough to attract his attention; yet she preferred him to any young man in the village, even to Peter Gorwyn, the smith's son, with his muscular six foot two, with whom she had made so merry on the day of the Scouring, or Job Lackland, who played the fiddle and whose appearance of fair girlishness was so misleading. They were all very well, either of those two, for a one day's fooling; she reckoned them at their proper worth, just as they reckoned her; Lovel alone was the serious business. She supposed that she could get Peter Gorwyn to marry her; he was a decent boy, and his sense of decency would certainly get him as far as the church,—and suddenly, in her mind, she saw quite complete the scheme by which she would decoy Lovel.

She brooded over this for some time, perfecting its details, with little gusts of excitement. There was as yet no very great urgency; she could afford to wait a week or two. Olver, moreover, whom she met one day that Mrs. Quince had sent her on an errand to King's Avon, informed her that his brother seemed very moody of late and short in the temper, from which she deduced that he was either not seeing Clare or that something had happened to cloud their friendship. The information reassured her, and she cheerfully completed her purchases, passing the time of day with her acquaintances and even accepting a glass of stout at the Waggon of Hay from young Gorwyn, of which she knew that Mrs. Quince would not approve; she looked at young Gorwyn over the rim of her glass as she drank, and wondered whether the day would ever come when she could tell him what she owed him: perhaps on the occasion of some future Scouring, when he and she were left behind among the old folks of the village, to dodder and dither in the sun of the street, perhaps she would tell him then, and a fine astonishment and a good though quavering laugh, he would get out of it. It was funny to look at him now, handsome enough as he lounged beside the bar, and to think of him bent double over a stick; funny, too, to think of what had been between them and of what it was perhaps to lead to. One never knew how things

were going to turn out. . . . She set down her glass on the counter, thanked him, and gathered up her parcels to go. He offered to accompany her, but she declined the offer; she had plenty to think about in her walk home over the Downs. "You're mighty pernicky to-day," he twitted her, rather relieved to be let off the consequences of the offer gallantry had prompted, and went with her as far as the door, and the old men sitting with their pipes in the chimney, corner commented, "A hefty pair."

She took the road which led out of the village on the western side and which presently ceased to be a metalled way and dissolved into one of those broad green tracks that all over the Downlands of England mark the course of the ancient paths. She had a good three miles to walk, but her numerous small parcels of groceries and haberdashery were not heavy, and her mind was occupied with the account she had heard of Lovel. She could think it over at peace while it was still fresh in her memory; at Starvecrow, Mrs. Quince would hustle her, and she would not have time to sort her impressions until she went up to her attic for the night, when she would be too tired for anything but sleep. It had been clever of her to refuse young Gorwyn's suggestion, although it went sorely against the grain with her ever to decline any man's company. Still, she had done well; this was the very place to think out ways and means, with the peace of evening falling and only the distant



bleatings of sheep to disturb a body's thoughts. So Lovel was moody, was he? something had gone wrong, and according to her shrewd and simple creed nothing could go wrong enough to provoke moodiness in a man who had no crops or beasts of his own to worry about except his dealings with a woman. Had Miss Warrener given him the cold shoulder at last? she wouldn't wonder, and was maliciously glad that Lovel should have met at last with a match in his own hoity-toity ways. That would show him, what it felt like. But she perceived that, although she had hitherto only congratulated herself over his discomfiture, it was in reality full of danger, for where was the danger to equal the danger of a reconciliation? She must, she saw it now, shoot her dart before Lovel and that hussy could make it up. But how to meet him? how to get so soon after this expedition, an afternoon's leave from Mrs. Quince? Besides, there was the circus soon visting King's Avon; she didn't want to imperil her chance of getting leave to attend that with her father and mother. She paused, cogitating, her finger pressed against the side of her nose. She looked around for inspiration. Nothing but the emptiness of the rolling country oddly broken by a few stray barrows and tumuli; a little farm half-hidden in a clump of trees; a water-mill slowly revolving with a recurrent flash from the setting sun; a hay-stack standing in a wattled enclosure by the side of the track. "As well look for an idea as for a needle in a

bundle of hay," she muttered to herself. The very thing! the very idea she wanted! Glancing cautiously round to see that no one was in sight, she bestrode the hurdles and thrust into the dusty depths of the haystack the most urgent and necessary of Mrs. Quince's many commissions. She would get a sound rating for her forgetfulness, but she would surely be sent back next day to King's Avon to repair the negligence, and then, if she could not contrive to find Lovel, might she be called a fool for ever after! Chuckling over her own ingenuousness, she hurried on her way. She had no eye for the beauty of the late summer evening, that so dusted with gold the hills that they might all have been one rolling field of standing corn, but hurried on, her mind full of her own small and artful schemes, and dwelling with relish on the thought of Clare and Lovel estranged within a stone's throw of one another in the village she had left behind her.

Her gauge of Mrs. Quince's irritability had been very accurate. The other parcels duly handed over, Mrs. Quince had demanded her thread, of which, she declared, she had not a morsel left in the house. She inveighed against Calladine, who was so impatient that he daily enquired when the new curtains would be finished, but she inveighed still more against Daisy, who, she exclaimed, must be bereft of all ordinary sense to forget any item of so careful a list as she, Mrs. Quince, had herself prepared.

Well, there was no help for it: back Daisy must go, and that no later than to-morrow, for besides the curtains there was all the mending to be done, and if she got a corn or a blister tramping the extra six miles she would only have herself to blame.

Daisy made no complaint. She was beginning to feel herself a match for them all, for if she could outwit Mrs. Quince, who was a woman, how much more easily would she be able to outwit Lovel, who was only a man?

Accordingly she started out on the following day, ostensibly penitent but inwardly triumphant, and slung down the hill, leaving on its height Starvecrow with its blown thorn trees and Calladine swinging his pick in the garden. The only thought which pre-occupied her, was where to find Lovel, for as she knew, his occupations took him in many various directions, and he was just as likely to be driving a herd into Marlborough to market as watching sheep on the Downs. Olver, however, she could be tolerably certain of finding in the village, and he, at least, might know his brother's whereabouts. On the way she retrieved the packet of thread from its hiding place in the stack, since she was too thrifty a soul to waste her own money in buying a new lot from the shop, and as she climbed rather laboriously back over the hurdles, she saw Lovel himself riding idly towards her up the green track.

He was alone; he had not seen her, for his

head was sunk and he rode with loose reins as a man profoundly dejected, not caring whither he went. Daisy stood watching his approach, superstitiously encouraged as to her ultimate enterprise by her initial good luck. Not only would no time be wasted, but she would be spared quite a mile's walk, for they were a good half-mile out of the village. How slack he rode! had she not been a woman in love with him, she would have pitied him. His horse slunk along as dejected as he, with drooping head and careless stumbling foot. They came up the track towards her at a walk, the reins swinging loosely from side to side, but even though he sat so lackadaisical in his saddle she noted the easy give of his body to the horse's gait, and the light touch of the hands that would tauten to an instant check should the animal start or shy. Shy indeed it did, as Daisy stepped suddenly out from the side of the track to intercept it, and Lovel was startled into instinctive vigilance, raising his eyes under the brim of his wide hat to see what stood in the way. But not so much life as even an expression of annoyance crept in his mournful eyes as he saw Daisy; he lifted his hat civilly, and would have ridden on, but that she detained him.

"Not so fast, Gipsy Lovel, when I've walked all this way from Starvecrow on purpose to see you."

She tried to make her tone arch rather than threatening; it was her habit to coax men rather

than to coerce them. She might have known that no woman, not even Clare, could coax Lovel when he was in the opposite humour, but the manner was too habitual for her to discard. "Won't you get off your horse," she said, "and sit down on the grass beside me while I say what I have to say to you?"

She sighted the hay-stack, out of which a section had already been cut, and thought in her cheap and common mind that if only she could get him to rest there with her, leaning back against the warm dusty hay, she would find greater ease in bringing him round to her point of view, for she was a staunch believer in the influence of physical comfort upon the tempers of men. "See, here's a nice place," she invited him, but with a cold patience he surveyed her from the height of his horse and begged that she would say her say with the utmost possible brevity and allow him to pass on.

The corners of her mouth began to go down ugly and sulky, as the first obstacle thwarted her on the path which had hitherto been so surprisingly smooth, but she hastily lifted them again, for it would not do to let ill-humour creep into their relations.

"Oh, well, I'll begin," she said as brightly as she could, "and if you feel like coming down from your grandeur half-way through, just stop me and I'll give you a breathing-space."

Lovel waited gravely, the shadow of his hat heavy across his eyes.

Now that Daisy was face to face with him, she was at a loss how to begin; she could not just blurt out her story and ask him to marry her; and anyway, he made her feel so insignificant, sitting there on a great horse like an idol, or like one of those soldiers she'd seen pictures of, in a steel helmet and a leather jacket and an upright lance in his hand. She told him this, and he listened unbending, silhouetted for her against the sky, mollified neither by her archness nor by her genuine confusion. "Oh, well, if you will have it up there," she said at last in despair, "I'll have to shout it up to you, but surely a poor girl never told a story in such a gawk of a position."

She began then, but, disconcerted, she began as she had not meant to begin, by saying "Do you recollect the Scouring this year?" and then hastily correcting herself, "No, no, I don't mean that at all, what I mean is, your young brother Olver . . .

"No, I don't mean that either," she said, seeing that his expression had become, if anything, a little sterner at the mention of Olver's name. "It's like this," she said desperately, "I'm over to Starvecrow now, at Mr. Calladine's, but it's a question how long I'll be able to remain in the place. And I thought that you, Nick Lovel, being a decent man in spite of all your pride, would be the last one not to help a poor girl when she had no one but you to turn to, and afraid to face her own parents, and not so much



as a married sister she could go to, or a penny of money saved, seeing Mr. Calladine's is my first place and Dad never paid me for the work I did on the farm, but a bit now and then to buy myself a pair of new shoes or a ribbon, and anything I had went on muslin for a dress to the Scouring, which I made myself instead of taking it to the dressmaker in Marlborough same as Annabel Blagdon. And it isn't for Mr. Calladine's getting married that I do be afraid of leaving the place, but for my own trouble, and that's a thing that Mrs. Quince is bound to find out sooner or later, and the only wonder is she hasn't started asking questions already, but now every time she opens her mouth I'm feared it's coming that I do feel my cheeks going all patchy, red and white, same as sometimes in the spring 'mong boys and girls. But I knew if I came to you, you would see it in the Christian light, and I could give in my notice and say I was leaving to get married, and 'twould be all envy and bless-you-Daisy, and Come-and-see-us-when-you're-a-married-woman, instead of Out-you-go-you-wanton-sheltering-behind-a-proper-gentleman's-name."

"What in God's name are you trying to tell me?" said Lovel.

"I'm trying to tell you I'm going to have a baby," replied Daisy, beginning to cry in good earnest.

"Well, that's no affair of mine; what is it you want of me?" said Lovel. "If it's money you

want, you're welcome to anything I can spare,—if you will only let me go my ways now," he added inaudibly.

"What good would money be to me," sobbed Daisy, "when I haven't a home to go to or a man to give me his name? My father'd turn me out, I know he would,—he wouldn't give me a corner of his barn or a truss of his hay for my baby to be born on, he wouldn't, and my mother wouldn't give me my own long-clothes to clothe its nakedness."

"You must get the fellow to marry you,—is he a native of these parts?" asked Lovel, perfunctorily, aware only of the overwhelming oppression of his own spirit and his urgent longing for solitude.

A cunning look came into her eyes when he mentioned marriage, and for the first time she recovered a little of her direction, which she had lost in her floundering to and fro.

"Ah, so you think he ought to marry me? Well, so do I," she said. "You'd think ill of a man who could let a girl go down and her child be nameless save for the name of a woman, which isn't a name at all?"

"Yes, yes," said Lovel, fretting to be at an end.

"Supposing I told you," she proceeded, slowly now and with caution, "that he couldn't marry? wasn't fit to marry?"

"Not fit to marry? if he's fit to be the father

of your child he's surely fit enough to marry," said Lovel.

"Well, but there might be other reasons,—ill-health, mightn't there? or he might be married already, let's say . . ."

"In any case, it doesn't concern me. I'm sorry," said Lovel, "but you're talking to me of things you'd better be talking of to another man."

"Are you so sure of that?" she asked, coming up to him and putting her hand on the neck of his horse. She was aware that her eyes must be all puffy and blubbered after her recent crying, but the crisis being at hand now, for good or for bad, she was not going to delay it until another occasion when she should have had a better chance of setting herself to rights. "Are you so sure of that?" she asked, in a tone she tried to make impressive.

"Sure?" echoed Lovel, looking at her in disgust at the implication that he himself could ever have touched her. He even gathered up his reins as a sign that he definitely wanted her to release him now.

"Not so fast," she said again. "There's such a thing as responsibility for other's actions, whether you like it or no. And it's a responsibility I'm not in a position to let you off. I have to think of my baby as well as of myself, you see, and so long as he gets the name of Lovel I'm willing to overlook him not getting

it from the proper quarter. Though why I talk of my baby as he, I'm sure I don't know," she added with a giggle, "for it's even chances it'll be a girl."

"What in the devil's name are you saying?" ejaculated Lovel contemptuously. "Name of Lovel? is your trouble sending you out of your senses?"

"No, it's brought me to them," she said tartly. "I may have been a fool in the past, and taken my pleasures too light where I found them, but that's over now, and for the future I'm going to look after myself and my baby. And if you don't take the proper steps, and the only decent steps, and the steps I want, there's not a soul in Wilts and Somerset but shall know the scandal of that daft beast you let roam about at his own free-will."

"What . . ." began Lovel, aghast.

"Yes," she cried shrilly. "'Tis all very well for you to be sitting up there so grand on your horse, with your eyes looking out over your nose, while your brother Olver who ought to be in Marlborough lock-up—and so ought you too, you poacher, for that matter—skulks about in dark barns taking advantage like the beast he is of poor girls on a scatter of straw. And I saw you, yes, I saw you, not only coming home from Marlborough fair, but often, quite the gentleman with Miss Warrener, and where had you two been, I should like to know? and it made me so mad seeing you that I didn't care what

any one done to me, whether it was Olver Lovel or another. I was crying after you all the time, if you want to know, so as I scarcely noticed a thing. And now, since even *you'd* scarcely see me married to that hoddody-doddy, you'll just have to marry me yourself, and pass off your nephew as your son for the rest of our life, and have only yourself to thank. And you needn't think you'll be losing your Miss Warrener any the more, for she's been promised to Mr. Calladine this many a week back."

"Promised to Mr. Calladine?" said Lovel, starting. "How do you know that?"

"Every one in the village knows it but you," she jeered, "and if you wasn't too proud to consort with your equals a bit more you'd know it too. Ask Martha Sparrow or William Baskett or any of them. Ask Mrs. Quince over to Starvecrow. Ask her if the house isn't being done up all grand against the lady coming. Ride over and see if Mr. Calladine isn't picking up a patch of garden with his own hands, forsooth. Ask parson if he hasn't had notice yet to call the banns. We'll have ours called the same Sunday. 'Richard Calladine and Clare Warrener, Nicholas Lovel and Margaret Morland, all of this parish.' That'll be a fine sit-up-and-take-notice for the congregation."

"I must speak to Olver first," said Lovel dully.

"Then you'll do it?" urged Daisy. "If you find that what I've told you's true, you'll do it?"

"Oh, yes, I'll marry you," said Lovel, tonelessly. "But I'll speak to Olver first," he added, "and you'll see the doctor."

"Oh, there's no mistake, you'll find," said Daisy, bursting into a hysterical laugh. "And I'm not so bad as you think me, Lovel. I'm thrifty in a house, and I'll make you a good wife, and I've loved you truly this long time, as well you know."

"For God's sake, spare me that at least, for God's sake spare me that," said Lovel in a voice of such anguish that even Daisy in the midst of her relief and jubilation was struck silent and ashamed.

The gossip of Mrs. Quince and Martha Sparrow had not taken long to reach the Waggon of Hay through the medium of John Sparrow. Blowing his old frame out with importance, he had hastened off to this favourite resort with the intelligence as soon as his daughter had whispered it to him, fearful lest any might have forestalled him, and he be greeted with derision as a bringer of stale news. But he need not have feared: he was the first direct link between the Waggon of Hay and Starvecrow, and it was to a gratifying inquisitive audience that, after due mystification, he finally made his announcement. Mr. Calladine to marry Miss Clare! Well, here was good health to them both, and a strapping posterity, and a bumper went round. The topic took its place in popularity with the



continuance of the dry weather (which was spoiling the roots), and the imminent arrival of a travelling circus, already advertised on hand-bills and posters all over the village. John Sparrow sat in the chimney corner with his pipe and his mug, and by recurrent reminders kept the fact green in the memory of his companions that, but for his connection with the Manor House, they would not yet have been in possession of the news. (And indeed, had they best known it, they were in possession of it even before the two persons chiefly concerned.) Every fresh arrival had to be told—"Well, now, Job, or Luke, or William, what sort of surprise do you think we have got for you?"—and laughter of the most elementary sort stirred the cobwebs about the rafters at every, "Well, to be sure, now, who would have thought it?" and the expressions of good-will to Miss Clare were many, though it was wished that she might have chosen a man who was a bit more of a man than Mr. Calladine.

One listener there was, who had received the information with anxiety, though without raising his voice in comment. Olver Lovel, for some days now, had haunted the Waggon of Hay, tolerated though not encouraged by the rustics. So long as he did no harm, made no noise, did not get drunk, and got in nobody's way, they would not object to his slinking round, surreptitiously finishing up the dregs out of other people's glasses. They were a little surprised to see him there, for they knew that in the past

his brother (who, let them do him justice, saw to it that the zany gave as little annoyance as possible), had put the Waggon strictly out of bounds for Olver. Olver knew it too; he knew also, what they did not know, that the embargo had never been removed, and that the Waggon was as much out of bounds now as it had ever been; but Nicco had been in so strange a mood of late—so strange, inattentive, and lenient a mood—that Olver was ready to run the risk of taking advantage. He did not know what had come over Nicco. Money and food seemed plentiful, although Nicco rarely went out poaching now; he would break into the savings-box and not seem to mind; he had even given Olver, on a bare request, enough money to buy a new smock; and their mother was allowed the matches at night now, for all the world as though Nicco no longer cared whether the house was burnt down about their ears or not. Olver had rejoiced greatly in this new order of things. Day by day he had grown more daring; little acts of insubordination passing unnoticed, he had at last achieved the supreme defiance of creeping down to the Waggon one evening, and had stayed there drinking up the dregs and listening to the conversation, half of which was to him unintelligible and half a source of awe and admiration, until ten o'clock at night. Still Nicco said nothing; did not ask where he had been; did not even comment on his absence from supper. Olver was full of contempt for this new, lax Nicholas—full

of contempt, but determined to make hay while the sun shone. No doubt the day would come when Nicco would fly into a rage, recover the matches, give Olver a thrashing, take away his new smock, and the old redoubtable order would be re-established. Somewhere, perversely, secretly, Olver hoped for that day; at present he felt himself a little like a horse allowed his head down a slippery hill. But this small, perverse and secret hope he did not admit even to himself. What! deplore the new system which permitted him to go to the Waggon almost every evening, to beg a twist of tobacco, to sit on the floor near the fire in the chimney corner, to listen, and to look—to look through the tobacco smoke at all the different-coloured spirits in the range of shining bottles, which reflected the tap-room rather in the same distorted way as his own little round mirror; at the steel handles on the bar-counter; at the coloured picture of the Queen and the late Prince Consort; at the photograph of the landlord standing beside a giant eight foot high—how could he deplore a system which permitted these delights?

And now in this same tap-room he had picked up the one piece of information he wanted. He knew now what was the matter with Nicco: Miss Warrener was promised to Mr. Calladine.

His gratitude to Miss Warrener doubled: not only did he owe her the mirror, which was incomparably the dearest of his few possessions,

but he also owed her, indirectly, his new smock and his visits to the Waggon of Hay. He owed her all Nicco's sad indulgence. His mother owed her the matches placed beside her bed every night. What benefits had Miss Warrener not conferred upon Olver and his mother!

So for a long time his feeble mind played round his debt to Miss Warrener, before it dawned upon him that Nicholas, to be so changed, must be very unhappy. His involved but absolute devotion to his brother flared instantly; he might deceive Nicholas, he might have fretted once, not so very long ago, beneath his severity; but in his eyes Nicholas was nevertheless God. At the mere thought that Nicholas might be unhappy,—might even now be sitting over the hearth at home, not angry with Olver because he no longer had the spirit left in him to be angry with anything or any one,—at these thoughts, which reached Olver's poor brain in a more or less confused form, he scrambled to his feet, much to the surprise of the company, which had been sitting quietly smoking and talking around him. He stood up by the bar, a wild and startling figure; ashes from the fire had blown into his hair, which moreover stood straight up on end as he ran his fingers despairingly through it. He burst into abuse, unmistakably directed against some woman. "Here, here: order!" cried authority, stepping hastily forward, but before it became necessary

to eject the disturber, he had vanished of his own accord out into the street.

Olver ran as fast as he could go down the street towards his own home. A light burnt behind the ill-fitting shutters both upstairs and down; that meant that his mother was not yet gone to bed, and that Nicco was at home. He irrupted violently into the kitchen; Nicco was sitting there, just as he had imagined him; doing nothing, staring into the fire. There was no sign of his having had any supper. Olver rushed up to his brother and threw his arms about him. "Nicco, I know it all now, the bitch, the baggage, but you shan't lose her if you want her. I'll get her for you,—trust Olver,—I'll get her out on to the Downs with something she gave me,—or I'll lend it to you to get her yourself if you like. I once told her you could if you were so minded. You shall have her. They said down at the Waggon that she was promised to Mr. Calladine. But she shan't go to him, she shall go to you."

"Olver," said Lovel quietly, "why did you never tell me about yourself and Daisy Morland in the barn?"

Olver began to stammer; he said, "I did tell you,—I told you she had seen you with Miss Warrener,—I told you I held her down and tickled her till she squealed,—I did tell you, Nicco."

"You told me half," said Lovel. A hope

pricked at his heart that Daisy's story might be false. "She has told me herself," he added.

Olver was quite sure now that his brother would kill him for this and for going to the Waggon of Hay,—for the two things together. He looked at Nicholas with his shifty blue eyes so oddly rimmed with black, and shuffled one foot over the other, but Nicholas' eyes held him and asked for the truth.

"Well . . ." he muttered.

"You had her?" said Lovel without mercy.

"And why not?" burst out Olver. "All the boys do,—yes, and brag about it. Look at Peg Lackland, going . . ."

"All right," said Lovel, with the same quietness; "I'm not blaming you." Not blaming him? had the world stopped going round? "Only if you ever tell any one this I shall kill you,—do you quite understand?"

Olver stared, but with Nicco's threat stability and familiarity seemed to be returning in some degree to his world. He nodded his head.

"I'm going to marry Daisy Morland myself," added Lovel, still fixing him with his eyes, "and I can't have it said that she has ever gone with my brother. You understand that, don't you?"

"Going to marry Daisy Morland? but Miss Warrener . . ." began Olver.

"Miss Warrener is going to marry Mr. Calladine," said Lovel steadily; "that has nothing to do with me, except that she was always civil to me when I met her on the Downs. I know my



standing, and Miss Warrener knows hers. She marries a gentleman, and I marry a farmer's girl; that's as it should be."

"So Daisy will come to live here?" said Oliver, completely mazed now.

"Yes," said Lovel brutally, "she will come to live here. She will be useful looking after our mother and keeping the place a bit better than you and I can keep it. And if ever it gets out that she once went with you, I break your head."

"Yes, Nicco," said Oliver humbly.

"You can tell all the village, if you like, down at the Waggon, that I am going to marry her," said Lovel.

"Yes, Nicco," said Oliver again, not fully grasping the implied sanction. "I'm sorry I went with her," he added out of his confusion.

"That doesn't matter," replied Lovel in his old weary voice. "Poor Olver, what does it matter? We're all so greatly to be pitied, what's that the more or the less?"

Calladine announced to Mrs. Quince that he was dining at the Manor House. Daisy rejoiced at this piece of news, for ever since her return to Starvecrow she had been nervous lest Lovel and Miss Warrener should meet and Lovel discover that she, Daisy, had in one particular exceeded the truth in her assertions. She hoped, —and would have prayed, but that her superstitious faith feared the possible blasphemy,—that Calladine would no longer delay his avowal,

but would return after dinner that night a betrothed man. Indeed, for all she knew, he might be secretly betrothed even now, not merely contemplating betrothal, and she thus have spoken the truth after all, albeit inadvertently to Lovel. Luck had been so much upon her side, that perhaps it might have favoured her also in this instance.

Never did lover set out accompanied by more earnest wishes for his success than Calladine that evening accompanied by the wishes of his housemaid.

Calladine found Mr. Warrener alone.

"I don't know what has become of Clare," said the old gentleman after greeting his guest; "it's unlike her to be late for dinner, especially when she knew you were coming. Perhaps I allow her too much liberty," he added, peering into Calladine's face to read whether he found any condemnation therein.

"Miss Clare," said Calladine, speaking gently, for he knew Mr. Warrener's occasional uneasiness, "is not a young lady whom it would be judicious to confine."

"Um,—wild, you think her?" said Mr. Warrener, rubbing his chin.

"Not wild,—only free . . ." Calladine breathed.

"She is a very great responsibility," said Mr. Warrener, perplexed.

Calladine smiled. Who were they, two cultured and scholarly men pacing a lamplit study,

to be disposing of the freedom of that airy spirit?

But he was gentle to the old man, for in many ways he loved him.

“Your safeguard, sir, lies in her trustworthiness.”

“A happy word,” said Mr. Warrener, immensely relieved, and they continued to pace the room, talking of other things, until Martha summoned them to dinner.

The candles between them, they dined. They spoke the same language, and the suavity that reigned was not only the suavity of the room. Almost, Clare’s absence was a relief; always, her elusiveness was a slight trouble, like a breeze in the room. Even now, she was present in their minds; their eyes flickered towards the door; where was she? dancing after what Will-o’-the-Wisp?

She came, more vivacious than Calladine had ever seen her; so lively now, that he thought her feverish, now drooping silent and listless, rousing herself to Mr. Warrener’s “Clare! Clare, you don’t hear what I am saying,” with a startled smile,—Mr. Warrener, in excellent spirits and full of discourse. Calladine watched her covertly, between the candles on the dinner-table. He would speak to her to-night; speak, lest he should lose her for the sake of a fancy. He could not wait, until the garden which she had ordained should be finished.

Yet, what haunted her? What wild grief lay beneath her gaiety?

But there was Mr. Warrener to reckon with, eager and garrulous to-night, and oblivious to the fact that Calladine wanted to stray out into the garden through the French windows with Clare. Calladine was enraged with impatience against the old gentleman, in whose trained and scholarly mind he usually delighted. Having wondered whether Mr. Warrener realised that he came to the Manor House as a suitor for his daughter's hand, to-night he crossly decided that the idea had never once entered Mr. Warrener's head. Otherwise it was impossible that he should be so obtuse . . . scrupulously courteous as he always was, and considerate the moment he recognised the need for any consideration. Calladine nearly laughed for his irritation, as Mr. Warrener, who was at work upon a new theme, brought out diagram after diagram, specimen after specimen, in his zeal to prove his point, dropping dates and facts into place like the cubes of a patterned mosaic. But to-night the facts and figures seemed to Calladine only brittle and dry, when life was waiting for him in the shadowed corner of the room. Clare sat there, in her rose-red dress, and now that she believed the eye of neither of the two men to be upon her, Calladine could furtively observe that she had relaxed the strain of her attention, and sat limp with her gaze fixed upon the dark garden through the window. The tight bodice moulded the extreme youth of her form; her hands lay idly clasped in her lap. His egoism

vanished before the pathos of her attitude. She became a child in his eyes: a child broken by some unexplained sorrow,—yet what sorrow, what sorrow could have come upon her in her free yet sheltered life? And because, however genuine his sentiment, he must always attitudinise to himself, he saw himself a sage and tender protector, the guardian of this too-emotional child against the fancied ills,—for how should they be otherwise than fancied?—that beset her. He realised then that he had lost count, as much as Clare herself, of what Mr. Warrener was saying, and saw to his relief, as he tried to make a flurried return to archæology, that Mr. Warrener was no longer addressing him, but had drifted into a soliloquy, according to his wont, with the little flints and shards ranged upon his desk.

“May Clare and I go out, sir?” said Calladine softly.

They wandered into the garden, Calladine tall and grave, Clare with the rustle of her silks and the little crunch of her heels, racing beside him up and down the garden path. She had been afraid, for a moment, that he was about to ask her to play or sing: music, with him leaning towards her over the piano . . . Reprieved from music, it was indifferent to her what she did. They paced the path; an owl whooped softly from the cedar; was answered, from afar off, out on the Downs.

Through the lighted windows they saw Mr.

Warrener, his lips still mumbling, bent meticulously over his shards.

Clare, with the rustle of her silks and the tap of her heels, and the private knowledge of her mind, looked away from Calladine.

He examined the words that she flippantly threw out, looking for bitterness, but no bitterness escaped her, looking for cynicism, but her lips were innocent of it. And nothing came to him but matter-of-fact questions, "Where had you been, Miss Clare?" and the like, which she answered civilly, though he knew that where her body had been was of no import, the only thing of import was the adventure of her spirit, and that he could never seize or follow. She was a stranger to him, irrevocably, and he savoured all the full pain of that phrase. "Where had you been, Miss Clare?"—oh, empty enquiry! what could she tell him, that would bring him nearer to her? but at the same time in a sudden frustrated rage he thought that were she ever to be his he would not let her out of his sight for a moment. Revengeful, he was; petulant; snatching,—and she so detached, cool, tantalising.

He called himself back; Clare made him lose his sense; he could put out his hand now and touch her bare arm, touch her flesh; such contact would be reassuring, would chase from his mind all ideas of her elusiveness; he could handle her roughly, if he would; drag her up into his arms, mutter angrily against her lips,—but even so, would he hold her?—and the old despair came



back upon him. She made him angry; there was no happiness for him, even in winning her, yet win her he must, and was determined upon it, for he was an obstinate man, with room in his head only for one idea once it had taken hold of him.

But he must be gentle with her, or else she would blow away from him like thistledown.

And while he was wondering how he might least scare her, he was shaking with his rage and his desire and his anxiety.

It was quiet in the garden; he liked the security of gardens, he liked the gentleness of these little grey West-country manor-houses such as the Manor House of King's Avon; they shut out the wild; they ignored the great pale Downs, and the roving of such dark people as Gipsy Lovel. And he began to talk, murmuring much of what he had obscurely felt, "A pastoral country," he said, "fair and straightforward, a stranger might think; and yet we who live in it know better, we know its dim hauntings, we know how present are the dead, we know the little countless tragedies,—the rabbit squealing beneath the stoat, the blackbird pecked by the sparrowhawk. We know the perpetual enmity that goes on under the apparent harmony." And,—what possessed him?—he spoke also of Lovel. "That dark, supple fellow,—he knows as much as anybody of the secrets of the woods; he's got a quick eye and a sure hand, and a glance like the glance of an animal ready to spring away; it's

a wild blood they have in them, the gipsies, whether they live in a house or move their hearth about with them,—a strong stain of blood, that never gets washed out. Look at that fellow, now,—he never takes a regular job,—he strays from farmer to farmer, when he isn't sneaking on his own concerns. And it's all the gipsy blood in him, Miss Clare,—untamed he lives, and untamed he'll die. But he understands the country, I dare wager, as well as any hare or kestrel that hides or flies, taking its chance of life and death."

It struck him as absurd that in this hour when all his faculty was bent upon so different a matter, he should be discoursing idly of the country and the vagrant fellow he was accustomed to sight sometimes upon a distant skyline; but he knew that some connection existed in his mind, and traced it down to his constant uneasiness about Clare. It was all very well for him to speak airily, confident now in the security of the Manor House garden,—outside the garden lay the Downs,—and where had Clare been? where did Clare spend all her days? Demure she paced beside him, and the black cedar spread its flat branches above the lawn, and within the lighted windows Mr. Warrener poked among the shards on his desk; secure! secure! but danger lay behind the pretence, danger in confederacy with Clare. Demure she paced beside him in the summer night, drawing her lace scarf close about her shoulders, so that one pale gleam-

ing hand lay against her breast, holding the lace, but she was silent, shut away with her uncommunicated thoughts.

He trusted himself abruptly to the direct question.

“Clare, what is the matter?”

She was too big, too simple, to defend herself with the ready-to-hand artifice of denial or evasion.

“Nothing is the matter which you can help, Mr. Calladine, thank you, and nothing that I shall not recover from.” She spoke the truth as far as she knew it. “I own that I have been vexed,—even hurt, perhaps,” she put her head up as she made the admission. “But I could scarcely hope to go through life, could I, without meeting some vexation by the way? and now that I have met it, I must take it, mustn’t I, without losing my sense of proportion?”

He smiled, in the darkness which secured his smile from her observation, at the phraseology of her piteous wisdom.

“But why not confide it to me?” he said, bending down towards her. “I am older than you, you know, and a trouble shared, they say, is a trouble halved.”

“My God, no,” she breathed.

He was shocked at such an expression on her lips. Had something or some one then really driven the child up to the bounds of her endurance? Was she too readily driven to such extremity of feeling? or was the provocation she

had received sufficient to justify it? alas, he had no experience of her capacity for emotion. But he thought, from what he knew of her, that she must be indeed profoundly troubled before she would betray her distress.

"If any man has hurt you," he burst out, "only tell me his name."

She opened her mouth and stared at him as though she were about to utter a name as he bade her, so strong was in her the habit of childish obedience, but with the name ringing, although not for expression, in her head, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. He was appalled at the passion of her crying. She had sunk down upon a bench, and he knelt beside her, trying to pull her hands away from her face, but she shook her head and turned away from him, isolating herself in the grief she was not yet accustomed to and could not yet understand. She could not understand it, and, tormented, desired only an escape from its weight and astonishment. "I am crying because you made me cry," she said, at last to Calladine; "I have not cried before,—I promise you I have not cried before," and at the thought of Lovel, absent and unconscious that she was weeping, unconscious of the fruit his harshness had borne, she wept afresh.

"Clare, Clare," said Calladine, pulling at her wet hands, "don't you remember, up by the Grey Wethers, a promise you made me? that if ever trouble came upon you, you would come to me

for help? Don't you remember,—the day of the Scouring? Where's your promise gone now? I would have held my hand in a flame that you would never break your word. Perhaps you thought it was fancy on my part; I was never more deadly serious. Isn't this the moment to give me my chance of serving you?"

She was so much surprised by the reminder that she took her hands away from before her face and gazed at him. Her tears over, the idea that she should go to Calladine for help against Lovel caused her to laugh mirthlessly. That Mr. Calladine should protect her against Lovel! well! well! She laughed again. "Clare," he exclaimed, "don't laugh so, you frighten me."

"There is one thing which you can do," she said slowly. He grasped at it; besought her to tell him what it was. Still she hesitated; yes, anything to get away from the pain of Lovel. And it would please Mr. Calladine; and if it pleased him what did it matter? perhaps she had often hurt him in the past as Lovel had hurt her now. "Marry me," she said; and added candidly, "I know you want to."

The arrival of the circus created an excitement in the village, poor affair though it was. It trailed in, one afternoon, trailed in through the gap in the earth-works; a couple of caravans, a merry-go-round, two or three cages on wheels, and some led horses; it trailed in with its air of perpetual perambulation and its poor pretence

of gaiety, and encamped itself, as it must have encamped countless times before, and would do countless times again, choosing this time the field of the sarsen stones, which by virtue of tradition was looked upon as common land, where any farmer might turn his beasts overnight before a market, or any fair or circus, as now, claim hospitality. The village boys came to stare at the preparations, at the gaudy yellow carts marooned among the grave ancient stones; they stared, vacantly chewing grass stalks, at the men who were getting up the tent, running with the ropes that were to fasten down the great, flapping thing, and heaving up the poles that transformed the amorphous folds into a shape and a transitory shelter. Of the animals there was not much to be seen; the cages were roped off behind the caravans, and nothing but a desultory roar betrayed the presence of these aliens among the English Downs.

Shortly after nightfall a man with red and yellow streamers pinned on to his coat and tied round the crown of his hat, passed down the village street beating a drum as a signal that the performance was about to begin. There proceeded already a stream of the population towards the fields, by twos or in families, and between the gate of the field and the tent the grass was already trampled into a track. Night was come; and within the opening of the tent the interior lighting glowed warm and fulvid; towards this square of light in the centre of the



field, thus inviting, the procession of villagers made its way, inwardly eager, outwardly sheepish, and drew together at the entrance, where a rude box-office had been erected, and another man with red and yellow streamers dispensed tickets in return for the coppers and six-pences paid across his little counter.

Inside the tent, the newcomers herded, uncertain. Most of the benches immediately around the central oval of grass were already filled up, and the rows of faces and hands were uniformly lit by the two gas-flares, one on either side of the supporting pole. The grass oval, under this light, appeared most brilliantly green. The roof and sides of the tent swept away into shadow,—shadow dimly peopled by the audience on the rising tiers of benches, of whom only the first two or three rows were illuminated, and the rest indistinguishable, save as vague rings of buff-coloured hands and faces, over which the light sometimes flickered fitfully. Over in one corner stood one of the yellow carts, its shafts propped up somewhat foolishly into the air, and its body, on which was painted in large black letters the single word, ORCHESTRA, filled by members of the company with bassoons and other wind instruments, the lower parts of their persons concealed by the sides of the cart, and the upper emerging like so many jacks in the box. Beside this cart was the opening for the entrance and exit of the performers.

Into this scene of flaming light, strong colours,

and deep shadows, came Lovel and his brother, the former so scowling and dark,—for he detested this appearance in public,—that he might rather have been a member of the traveling mountebanks than of the yokel audience. As he stepped out into the light, followed by Olver, this defiance was almost absurdly evident in his manner. He knew that the light was full on his face and on the figure that shambled behind him, and that the eyes of the audience were turned with a mild curiosity towards the pair; he felt himself to be an incident of the show they had all come to see. He looked round for a place. A few kindly neighbours made room on one of the front benches, so that, although Lovel would have preferred a more retiring seat, he was obliged to take his place there with Olver, at his side. Olver was gazing all round with the fascination of a child. He had never seen so many people gathered all together before, and his neighbours, familiar to him as individuals, acquired a new impressiveness when seen thus together in their numbers; he had never seen a circus ring, or an illumination so strange or so effective as that cast by the gas-flares; and as for the performance itself, he had nothing but vague and fantastic ideas of what he was about to behold. Very furtively he brought out from his coat pocket the round mirror which Clare had given him, and bent over it; reflected in it, he saw the lights, and the ring of faces, the thin scarlet rope, the shadows, the green grass, the

yellow cart, according as he turned it. Lovel sat stiff and erect beside him, staring straight ahead, his arms folded across his chest. Oliver bent lower over his mirror. He chuckled softly over it. The orchestra now stood up in the cart and began to play, brassily, noisily, but to the great delight of the audience.

Oliver was annoyed because he could not see reflected in his mirror the agreeable noise which the band was making, and the tiny reproduction of the scene was thus rendered incomplete. Still he peered into the mirror, where the picture was small and distant, as seen through the wrong end of field-glasses, and also with that slight distortion which never failed to enchant him: the supporting pole appeared slightly bent, the scarlet ropes curved round like serpents, and each face, as he examined it separately, was a tiny caricature of the face reflected.

With the blare of the band Lovel relaxed a little from his rigidity; he glanced round him, nodded briefly to a few acquaintances, and considered with an uninterested eye the scanty properties of the show standing prepared near the performers' entrance. He heard the eager whispering going on in the audience, and, being himself scornful and unhappy, was possessed by a passing contempt. He saw Martha Sparrow there with her brother John, and a group of the cronies from the Waggon of Hay; he caught sight of Farmer Morland with his wife and daughter, and instantly looked away, for he had

seen Daisy's eyes fixed upon him, and had no wish to respond to the smile she was holding in readiness. No doubt they considered that he ought to have escorted her. At that moment he saw Clare come in with Mr. Calladine.

He had not expected this, and remained transfixed, staring at them in complete dismay. Clare came in shyly, turning to speak to Calladine over her shoulder; she was wearing a dark blue cloak over her muslin dress, and no hat, only a dark blue ribbon in her hair. Coming, in her turn, into the light, she hesitated with a perceptible confusion that seized Lovel by the heart. Calladine came forward, competent and proprietary, found her a seat, and took his place beside her; they bent together over the leaflet of the programme. Still Lovel stared; she looked up, and their eyes met across the width of the ring. Her lips parted; for a full minute they stared at one another. He saw the blush rising, like a flame of reproach, in her cheeks. For that minute, as their heads swam, they had no thought of the pairs of eyes observing them: of Olver's, of Daisy Morland's, or of Calladine's, respectively with a mischievous, a jealous, and a dismayed absorption. Then Clare came to her senses; she looked deliberately away, looked around, searching for faces she might greet, found Martha Sparrow, found some of the tradesmen, and smiled to them all with disproportionate alacrity. She spoke again to Calladine, whose pride in her had changed to a visible

moodiness; he answered her indeed, but briefly, and sat angrily tapping the top of his walking-stick against his teeth. Lovel, having no knowledge of the world, but only his instincts, wondered whether he should leave the tent, or should remain to enjoy the atrocious pleasure of watching her once again. He knew that now he would have to fight out his renunciation afresh from the beginning; the dull resignation which had clouded over him of late had all melted away in a second before her restored presence. Merely to see her sent the heat and ecstasy of life back into his veins. Twenty-eight years of existence had not accustomed him to the rush of his own emotions. Such a reasonless joy as this which seized him even while he knew that she was promised to Calladine, still had the power to surprise him.

The beginning of the circus did not distract him; rather it favoured him, for under the cover of the general interest he was able to gloat his eyes upon her to his heart's content. Olver, who had long ago made up his mind about his brother, had now little desire to watch for the manifestations of a passion he took for granted in spite of all Nicco's denials, and devoted the whole of his rapt attention to the events of the ring. These were enough to transport his simple soul, easily pleased at best. Piebald horses, and fat thighs encased in pink tights, curvetted before him; while with flashing smiles young men and women performed apparently impossible feats

of strength and balance. Olver presently conceived the idea of following the circus in his mirror, and alternated between the actual, which was already entrancing enough, and the reflected, which provided him with a world so indescribably and doubly queer. He hoped that the little, queer, brilliant pictures would be preserved forever in the depths of the glass. A fat woman in pink and spangles jumped through paper hoops off the back of a cantering horse, crying "Hop!" as she jumped and again as she landed, and the manager standing in the centre cracked his long whip at the horse's fetlocks, but only hit the clown, whose whitened face, ghastly under the gas-jets, went bowling round in somersaults over the grass of the ring. There was also a snake-man, dressed from head to foot in emerald green, who contorted himself in the midst of a silence rendered more impressive by the sudden cessation of the braying band, into the knots common to all such performers; and the laughter which had accompanied the clown was stilled into a respectful awe. The snake-man, Olver found, was especially effective seen in the mirror.

The atmosphere in the tent by now was somewhat clouded by tobacco smoke, softening the hard, high glare of the gas, and through the smoke the faces appeared hazy, sitting round in their rows, likewise the hands, that periodically broke out into a beating of applause. But to Lovel, who had not taken his eyes off Clare, her



face was distinct as ever; and his own face, to Daisy Morland, was distinct, and, above his red shirt, dark and proud.

In the ring now were three small bears, one dressed as a clergyman,—whose appearance had provoked roars of laughter,—one as a lady, with a poke bonnet and bustle, and the third as a clown, the buffoon and wag of the party. These three sad animals were at their tasks of travelling round the ring on large balls, pushing a perambulator, balancing on a tight rope, or whatever it might be; Lovel, in so far as he bestowed a passing interest in the show, was indignant at the pitiful degradation. The audience had no such niceness; they roared their hearty laughter, and some of those sitting immediately behind the scarlet ropes even thrust a foot towards the bears as they passed round in their drab monotony, provoking a dull turn of the head and a lack-lustre glance, too spiritless even for a snarl. Arm in arm the clergyman and the lady paraded the ring on their hind legs, stopping now and then to bow gravely; they stopped thus opposite to Clare and Calladine, recognised by the quick eye of the manager as the only gentry present. Clare and Lovel looked at one another once more when this occurred, a look in which their personal passion, for once, had no part, but only discomfort and sympathy with the indignity put upon the beasts. Yet that look, impersonal though it was, only tightened Lovel's heart the more, for it had in

it all the intimacy of their understanding, in the same way as when they had been used to look across the Downs, and, seeing the bowling shadows of the clouds, had spoken no word, but sometimes smiled, knowing each so well the thoughts that were passing in the mind of the other.

He began to wonder what he should do when the show was over, and the moment came for every one to leave the tent. He was near the exit; should he hurry out and hasten home, shutting the door of his house behind him, before Clare and Calladine had so much as turned into the street? "Likely they'll wander home by the fields, being lovers," he said to himself. Or should he go boldly up to Daisy and invite her to walk home with him, in order to prove to Clare the extent of his indifference? He rejected this course, despising its cheapness. Or should he remain seated where he was, letting Clare and Calladine pass out of the tent before him? The one thing to be avoided was the jostle in the exit. He might get pushed up against her, or against Calladine,—if he felt Calladine jostle against him he would turn and hit him. But he had Olver to reckon with; Olver who would tug at his coat and bid him come, if he tried to remain behind; Olver who would in any case torment him afterwards with questions as whether he had seen Clare; and, half turning to look at Olver, he caught sight of the mirror held tilted, over which the boy stooped with such ab-

sorption, and he wondered idly where Olver had got this toy, that seemed so to fascinate him and to occupy so much of his time; but after that passing curiosity he returned to his own miserable concerns that gnawed like rodents at his brain, and his eyes perpetually sought the face of Clare, as though in her fairness lay simultaneously both the problem and the solution.

So turned inward upon himself was he, that a sudden shout was the first thing to rouse him. He raised his head; a sheet of flame shot upwards from the gas; all was confusion suddenly; the audience rose and stampeded into the ring, trying to get to the exits; benches were overturned; women screamed, men swore; overhead the flame tore a great hole in the darkness, and portions of the burning canvas floated, turning over and over, down to the ground.

Lovel fought his way through the striving mass of people like one possessed, caring nothing who he pushed aside or who he struck and elbowed. For one second he came upon the terrified face of Daisy; she tried to cling to him, but he threw her off. He was fighting against the tide of the crowd. By now the canvas was roaring overhead, the shouts increased, the panic surged wildly towards the narrow openings, all round was nothing but terror and a mad confusion. Lovel clove his way through the sea of limbs and faces; he tore a path by sheer fury. Reaching Calladine, he thrust him aside, and seized Clare by the hand. "Come," he said,

dragging her. He was obliged to put his arm round her shoulders and half carry her along as with the other arm he opened up a way for them both. The exit was hopelessly blocked; he took his knife from his pocket and ripped a long vertical slit in the side of the tent, through which he forced her first and then himself after her, and the crowd seeing this escape, streamed through after them. The night air was suddenly cool around them. He picked her up and carried her away to the top of the encircling embankment. The Downs were black behind them, and from the height of the ridge they gazed down upon the red leaping flames in the field below.

The field was wildly lit up, and around the blazing tent stood the crowd in a circle, watching the destruction they could not prevent. The flames reared to the height of trees, holding up the blackness; the light fell upon the shapes of the sarsen stones, that, unmoved, regarded this disaster as they might have regarded any other. Clare seized Lovel's arm.

"Are they all safe?"

"They will be, by now," Lovel replied mechanically.

"The animals," cried Clare.

At that, Lovel returned to earth, and a slow smile of amusement crept over his mouth.

"Why, they will have escaped," he said slowly; "escaped and be roaming about till morning.

The village besieged by bears. Well, Miss Warrener, it will not be the first time that bears will have been loose among these stones or prowling on the Downs. Will we all turn out with sticks and staves to-morrow to drive 'em in? Come and ride them in, Miss Warrener, to-morrow morning before any one else is astir. Will you do that?"

"With you?" she asked.

"Why not?" he replied. "But I forgot," he added, "Mr. Calladine has the disposal of your doings now, has he not? Many's the pleasant hour you spend over books or in your garden; gentle and pleasant. There was a time when you rode rough as a boy; but that's over now. Your finger nails are smooth," he said, taking her hand and examining it critically by the vague light of the flames; "the hand of a lady," and he lifted it up and sniffed it. "Scented too!" he said. "Scented for Calladine to kiss and fondle," and gently he gave it back into her keeping, shaking his head. "Ah, Miss Warrener, it was a terrible mistake you made when you rode your pony in your little shepherd's cap; 'twasn't that you were cut out for. No, but for a lady's life. 'I shall want the carriage this afternoon, Mrs. Quince, to drive to Shrivenham.' " He minced the words. " 'And I shall want the rug put in the carriage lest it turn cold at sunset.' No more catching your pony in the paddock when the fancy takes you for a gallop across the hills.

I'll come as your groom, if you'll have me, and promise to keep away my brother, whose touch startles horses."

"You must let me go home," said Clare, who, white-faced, was holding her cloak about her.

"Remember, there are bears," said Lovel. "A bear dressed as a lady, a bear dressed as a clergyman, and one, poor soul, as a clown. They are walking arm-in-arm, perhaps, as they did in the ring, but if they met you walking alone across the fields they might remember that they were born wild. They might forget that they had been tamed to civility. Cap off: 'Good evening, miss,' as I might meet you in the lane. Never trust the brute too far. But shouldn't Mr. Calladine be here to protect you?"

"How can he see me up here?" said Clare. "The night is very dark, and the light down there must blind him."

"You have on a light dress under that cloak," mocked Lovel, "if you want him to see you." But she did not throw aside her cloak, and he noted it.

At that moment came a cracking sound, as the central pole of the tent crashed down, bringing with it what was left of the flaming canvas. A loud cheer went up from the crowd, who, now that their own skins were safe, were irresponsibly quite ready to accept one form of entertainment in substitution for another. The fire died down for a moment, then flared up again, as some of the benches and trestles caught alight. The pro-



prietor of the circus raged round, clasping his head with his hands, but there was nothing to be done, and the few buckets of water brought from a neighbouring well made no difference at all.

"Mr. Calladine is not more prompt at finding you here than he was in getting you away from the tent," said Lovel.

"Why do you gibe at Mr. Calladine?" Clare burst out. "He has had a great deal to suffer at my hands, and it ill becomes you to sneer," she finished inconsequently.

The inconsequence did not trouble Lovel; his mind leapt the gap with the ellipsis.

"At all events he has nothing to complain of at present," he remarked. "Nothing, except that he is not the man to take good care of what he has obtained. Born irresolute—there's a disadvantage of birth as bad as any other. Yet, I'd exchange my own for it; I'd accept to have only myself to overcome. Yes, by God, I've no sympathy for him. Why doesn't he carry away his conquest? Too uncertain of his own worth? Look at his face—haggard with doubt of himself. I scarcely envy Calladine. He's a straw to be swept away by a strong current, safe only so long as he may lie in shelter. If I wanted to undo Calladine, I should say to him, 'Are you sure that you are the man to hold so untamed a thing?' As yourself, I mean, Miss Warrener. Or am I mistaken? Are you a lady at heart—a lady and not a woman? Mrs. Richard Calladine. The muslin dress, or the shepherd's cap?"

If the muslin dress, then go to Calladine. If the shepherd's cap, then . . ."

He paused.

"I should not listen to you, reducing Mr. Calladine to this insignificance," murmured Clare in great distress.

Calladine had become a shadow; a poor grey wisp drained of blood. Only Lovel and herself seemed alive, so terribly alive that the wraith which was Calladine faded between them. So far, no one had noticed them standing up on the ridge of the embankment; the night was, as Clare had said, very dark, and furthermore a few sparse trees helped to conceal them. They stood, not very far from one another, very much isolated, detached from the glow and excitement of the fire down in the field below, as though they were two travellers come to a brief surveying pause on the road which they pursued together.

"Mr. Calladine is not the poor creature you think him," said Clare on an impulse. "Years ago he loved a woman, still unforgotten. That is not the fidelity of a weak man. I tell you this, in order that you should think better of him, and knowing that you will keep it to yourself."

"A woman he never got?" said Lovel. "And brooded over her ever since? Do not doubt—Miss Warrener, he coaxed himself into loving her more, during all those years of brooding, than ever he did when he had her before his eyes. Be very sure, she made a proper fool of him, to

embitter him so for a lifetime—until he found you. Don't be too sorry for him. He has enjoyed living upon that memory."

"Oh, you are hard and cynical," said Clare, vexed, because she saw suddenly the whole of that episode, which, in her eyes, had always thrown so picturesque a colour over Calladine's melancholy—saw it now in a cruel, naked light, Calladine duped first, and then retiring in sulky discomfiture, to build upon a silly, sordid, mismanaged story an erection of wordy romance: "I wish I had not told you; you take every opportunity, to-night, of belittling Mr. Calladine."

"I? Oh, no," said Lovel, carelessly, "and in any case, why do we talk about him so much? he is not here, but to-morrow you will again be with him, and the day after that, and the day after that. Even now he is probably arrived breathless at the Manor House, where he will tell your father that that gipsy fellow snatched you away, and that he has lost you altogether. He has never given me anything but black looks, ever since he came to live here. How much have you told him about yourself and me?"

"There was nothing to tell," said Clare.

"True," said Lovel. "There was nothing to tell."

They were silent. She felt that he was in a highly dangerous mood. Calladine was not dangerous; violent, but not dangerous; not as Lovel's contained quietness was dangerous. Lovel, at any moment, might suddenly leap upon her;

he was so lithe and quick. Moreover, she felt now, in his company, that she was alone with him on a hill or a wide heath, for the people down in the field below had no significance whatever, no more than had Calladine, to whom she was promised.

"I ought to go home now," she said presently.

"Oh, yes," said Lovel, turning on her, "you ought to go home. Go home and tell them that the gipsy fellow took you out, rudely enough, but still into safety. Go and tell them that once or twice on the Downs you gave him a few kind words and that he presumed upon them to get you out of that tent to-night. Tell them that once he rejected your kindness,—which you offered out of your pity for him,—and drove you away with harsh words.

"We have not spoken since," she said.

"No," he replied without comment.

Suddenly they began talking quite naturally and gently with one another.

"Who would have thought," said Lovel, "that you would be coming to the circus. Not that I should have come, nor you, I fancy, either, had we known what we were to see. Yet we might have thought. Wild beasts turned to buffoons. I would have liked to let a tiger out of its cage, loose among the crowd. Did you see their eyes? yes, even the little pig-eyes of the bears. I wouldn't like to look into the eyes of the tigers in their cages, when they stare through the bars. Trundled about over England in those

cages. . . . Why did you come? I came to please poor Olver."

"And I because Mr. Calladine was dining at the Manor House, and I . . . oh, there is nothing to do after dinner," she finished lamely.

"What do you do as a rule?" he inquired, with a passing curiosity.

"I don't know," she replied. "Sometimes he talks to my father, sometimes we walk in the garden, sometimes I sing."

"You sing," he repeated. "You sing."

"Sometimes he and my father go over the things in my father's cases, and they forget me, and I sit in a corner with some stitching."

"Yes," said Lovel, "and the windows are open down to the floor, and the moths and cockchafters fly in from the garden towards the lamps, and you let your stitching fall into your lap while you watch them."

Clare was utterly startled.

"How do you know?" she murmured.

"Oh, I know," he replied. His vision of the room, and of the three, was so sifted and precise. "Sometimes you sing?" he prompted her.

"Mr. Calladine leans over the piano, when I sing," she said, looking at him big-eyed.

"That frightens you?" he said, more as a statement than as a question.

"A little," she said, telling him what she had thought she could never tell to a soul. "He seems so soft, and yet so hungry." Her voice sank.

Lovel understood; he nodded.

"If he would sit away in the corner," continued Clare, "I should not be afraid of him. It is his leaning over me like that. It makes me look at him all the while I sing. But he likes my singing; he asks me to do it, and he will not let me refuse."

"And sometimes you walk in the garden," he said, still in the same voice, as though he were looking at a tiny picture seen down the end of a long vista; "does he frighten you then?"

"Less out of doors; less when we are not shut in. I avoid the trees; being under them is more like having a ceiling over our heads. I keep to the lawn.—He is more in his place, within doors," she said, making a discovery which answered many of her problems.

"Lamplight suits him," said Lovel, his perceptions very clear and malicious.

She saw Calladine leaning over the piano; she saw his greying hair and his fine hands lying loosely clasped on the ebony lid. She heard the notes under her own fingers playing a slow gavotte; it was the music he liked. She felt her eyes coming round again and again in fascination drawn towards his face. A breeze fanned her cheek; and she saw herself standing with Lovel on the earthwork, the stars above their heads, and the red glow of the dying flames deepening the shadow of his brow.

"We have always been in the open together," she murmured involuntarily.



"I have never seen you in a room," Lovel corroborated.

"The day that I found you on the Downs," she said painfully, "the day when I last saw you,—you tried to hide from me among the beeches. Why was that? Did you hope that they would protect you? Did the sense of enclosure give you strength? Would the Downs have compelled you to be more honest? I believe it was that. One can lie better,—can't one?—in a room; and as you had no room you took the shelter of the trees. You couldn't tell me lies out on the Downs?"

"Is that why Calladine prefers a room?" he enquired.

"Mr. Calladine tells me no lies," she said, with a small flicker of pride.

"Oh, no," said Lovel easily; "he only tells lies to himself. Through and through. Or are they lies? Romances, perhaps. Only romances. And you are part of them. But they couldn't thrive in sunshine."

"We are not in sunshine now," she said; "only in star-shine, and losing our heads a little. I am going to marry Mr. Calladine, you know, Lovel. So perhaps I should not talk about him to you as I have been talking, or . . . or indulge myself in these fancies. You asked me what I had told him about yourself and me; I answered that there was nothing to tell; nor is there."

"But if I had not gone into the beech-

clump . . .” began Lovel. He was suddenly Puckish, mischievous; or so she thought.

“But you did go into it!” she cried out.

“And stayed in it till you were out of sight. But Calladine,” he resumed, disregarding her effort to restore the balance of their conversation, “Calladine will get you into a room for the rest of your life. It will be a dim room, with the light shrouded from it. He will talk in it, and you will listen, and his talk will seem to you less and less unconvincing. Presently you will accept it as natural talk; you will answer in the same key. You will play sad old tunes, and Calladine will lean over the piano. But he will grow less graceful and more ungainly, and his joints will crack when he stoops over your hand to kiss it. And always you will be in the house, —in the room.”

“Lovel!” she cried.

“The dimness of the room will bleach your spirit,” he said finally and remorselessly.

What strange mood possessed him? Were the legends true? had he the gift of prophecy? His very language had a sonorous, almost a Biblical, ring. It was true that the occasion fostered it, and that he might be taken for a prophet, standing there on the elevation, ringed with darkness, and with that pool of dying fire at his feet.

“Is it kind, Lovel, is it kind to put these thoughts into my head?” she cried, distressed.

“Kind,” he said scornfully. “When did ever

you want kindness from me? I haven't given you kindness, or romance like Calladine's. I keep kindness for Olver."

"And for animals," she interjected, remembering. The remembrance softened her marvelously towards him.

"And for animals. But for you . . ." He scanned her from head to foot, as though the term for what he had given her were inexpressible. "Not kindness for you," he finished up.

A great uproar arose in the field below; the crowd scattered, and down the pathway thus cleft they saw, by the light of the flames, a small black shape bundling helter-skelter along, till a ring of shouting men closed round it and hid it from view.

"Rounding up the wild beasts," said Lovel, amused. "They won't sacrifice them on the stones,—not they. They'll all be chivvied back into their cages after a few louts have got a nip on the ankle. I wonder how many will remain at large? All the old women of the village will be going about to-morrow with umbrellas and pokers. See, now, they are beating out the fire."

The last sparks flew large and red in the darkness.

"Fire and wild beasts and the stones," murmured Lovel dreamily. "How many centuries is it, do you think, since those three things have met together here? The place will get a bad name among owners of circuses. They will say

that it clamours for its natural prey; that the circle is under a curse; that it scents blood; and a hundred such fabulous things." He laughed as he spoke, but Clare, looking at him, thought that the fantastic creature half believed it himself. "What will you say, when they want to know where you have been?" he asked. "You won't dare own up to the gipsy fellow. You'll say you watched the fire, and let it be understood that you were alone,—isn't that so?"

"Of course I shall say I have been with you; why not?" said Clare.

"Ah, but I'd rather you didn't," he said earnestly. "Keep it a secret,—that we stood and talked unseen while the rest beat the fire out down below. I had not thought that I should see you again, and now I know that I shall not see you again,—in the distance, perhaps,—and hear the bells for your wedding,—and see you driving by,—Mrs. Richard Calladine,—but I shall never stand again with you alone as in this hour. Let us keep it a secret. I don't care what you think of me. Look, the fire has gone out now, and it is quite dark, but the time I spent with you was lit by the fire. I will walk round with you to the Manor House, and let you go."

In silence they started off to walk round the top of the earthwork towards the Manor House. The village lay below them in its strange cup, and around outside the circle lay the Downs hunched in the starlight. Where the road intersected the circle they ran down the slope and

crossed it, their footsteps briefly crunching on the gravel, but on the opposite side they scrambled up again and silenced steps on the turf and continued side by side along the high ridge above the ditch. A breeze from the Downs blew cool against their cheeks; they knew it well, it was a friend pleading with them, calling them back to the open. They both knew the Downs so well that in their consciousness they were all the time aware of the country's geography, stretching before them like a foreshortened map; the long roads, the little English towns with their broad main-street that was only a section of the Roman highway, the ancient green tracks over the hills, and the angular spatchcock landmark of the White Horse, straddling on the hillside. Neither of them had thought sufficiently beyond these things to be tormented by the further world. But, on the other hand, they had attained a degree of familiarity and concentration undiminished by any scattering of their faculties. They had not sprinkled their interest over other lands and other folk. They had dwelt only on their country and on themselves, so that the breeze came to them direct as a messenger from the Grey Wethers lying out derelict on the hills, and the sickness of the desire of each to respond to the call found an echo in the soul of the other.

So vivid was the call, so absurd the refusal, that as they reached the point above the trees of the Manor House garden, Lovel stood still and laughed out loud.

"So you go back to rooms," he said, and laughed again, but more bitterly. "You!" he said, charged with contempt.

They were closer in understanding than ever they had been in their lives. He began to speak low and rapidly, "Clare," he said, "there is no more softness in you or in me than there is in this soil. There is no flabby flesh, only bone. No trappings, only the hard skeleton. We've pared away. . . . If I had not taken shelter in the beechwood,—and it was the nearest approach to shelter I could get,—I might have taken you by the hand and galloped away with you; you would have come. That would have been mad. I have got my mother and Olver, and not only that, but I've got their blood in me. I want to have sons, and I may not, because of that blood. That was why I said I envied Calladine having only himself to overcome, when here am I as hard as flint, who might beget sons with that soft squelch in them that has rotted Olver. A bad stock, I said to myself; be strong; let it die out. And then the irony . . . well, you know nothing about that, and even that seems not to matter now. Never be surprised, now, if you hear that I have been borne a son or a daughter, only don't judge me too harshly. But how could I have brought you to my mother and Olver? and our children, yours and mine,—how could I, Clare? What chance had I but to cease from seeing you? Oh, if it had not been for them and my blood, then there would have been the Downs



for you and me, Clare. Don't share the Downs with Calladine; he lives among them, but he isn't strong enough to endure them. There are some countries that it takes a strong man to endure. They don't generate strength, and they crush weakness. Calladine should have lived in towns. But now that he has got you he may be rescued."

"You know that Mr. Calladine has not got me, and never will have me, except in name," said Clare.

"That's true," replied Lovel, not disputing her statement. "Let him live with you by his side, you listening, listening patiently, for as long as he chooses to discourse, and looking at him with the eyes of a stranger. I don't say that I envy him. ("How you despise him!" she breathed.) And yet," he said, "don't I envy him a little? Can I help myself? He will see you every day, he will be able to call your name through the house at any moment and hear your answer. Don't I envy him that? Wouldn't I change places with him for that?—But he'll tire of you, perhaps," he added, dropping from his sudden anguish into the old whimsicality, "tire of you even though he has never got you. No, I don't envy him. I'll be less lonely," he said with a fine insolence, "than he."

"I must go, Lovel," cried Clare.

He stepped back from her instantly.

"Go to Calladine,—in name. Go from me,—in name," he said, out of his torn heart. "Only

go,—go,—go!” he added, turning away from her and laying his arm across his eyes.

She left him then, feeling, although he had not once touched her, as though she had slipped all on fire from his clasp, so close had been their communion in spite of their immense separation. She did not know where he would go, or how long he would remain, gazing after her, standing on the height of the circle. For her own part she ran down amongst the trees, across the lawn, and entered the study by one of the French windows, to find her father absorbed in his work, not having noticed her absence, and blissfully unaware of any excitement or of his daughter having been in the slightest degree in danger. He said, “Bless me! bless me!” several times while she flung herself with exaggerated animation into a description of the fire, and pushed his spectacles up on to his forehead, and stared at her with an absent-minded interest as though she had just come straight out of the heart of the flames. “Dear, dear, and where’s Calladine?” he said at last. “There was something very curious I’ve come across and particularly wanted to show him. It quite corroborates my ideas. I made sure he’d bring you home.” “But you don’t understand, father: the circus-tent caught fire, and we got separated.” “Of course, to be sure,” said Mr. Warrener mildly. “Well, I daresay he’ll come over to-morrow, and I can show it him then. It’ll interest you too, Clare. . . .”

Clare lay awake for a long time. The windows of her room were open, and outside the breeze sighed, a plaintive spirit trying to get into the house. The world outside was crying to her, endeavouring to reach her, sending its gentle messengers to plead with her. The heavy-foliaged trees rustled, as it seemed, with an unwonted nearness to her window, and the room was full of the insects of the night, which as soon as she had turned out her lamp woke into life and fluttered against her cheek and thudded softly against the ceiling like small downy ghosts. A moth imprisoned beneath her hand struggled for freedom; she shook it off with a gesture between tenderness and revulsion. Several times she lit a match, and the little creatures became still, flecking the bed with their long mottled bodies and closed wings, but no sooner had darkness fallen again than they returned in greater numbers to their soft wheeling and the bruising of their voiceless plea. She lay now shivering in spite of the summer warmth, awed to her very soul by the deepened significance of night. Darkness by shutting away the visible and reassuring world opened the field to all finer perceptions, to all the mysterious relationships, to the purified intuition of essential unity. That sense,—the sense of unity, the discarding of all irrelevancies,—was an unexpressed link between herself and Lovel; she was not sure, everything else being sifted down to its last bare expression, that it was not *the* link. Out in the night some-

where an owl hooted, and she heard the distant baying of a dog; the spacious presence of the Downs opened out before her widened senses, their loneliness, and the secret of their ancient tombs; their untilled defiance rolling eternally under the stars. Where was Lovel now? Was he still standing like a sentinel on the dyke, between the Downs and the sleeping village, with only the vault of the black sequined sky above his head? as she fancied him there he seemed to grow in stature until in his heroic proportions he became an embodiment of that open country which called to her, and his voice rose harmoniously in a long cry above the southing of the breeze in the trees. Or had he plunged down from the circle after she had left him, to roam across the uplands, a wisdom in his feet, a swiftness that lifted him above fatigue? That he was out somewhere in the night she was sure; no house would confine him, not even a house whose walls were built of the sarsen stones. He was out somewhere, and every moth that bruised itself so plaintively and so impotently against her was his envoy; every sound that reached her, whether the whisper of the breeze or the churning of a night-jar, bore the burden of its message from him to her. If she called back to him "Lovel! Lovel!" surely in one form or another her voice would find him among the hills.

## PART TWO





## Part Two

SHE had been married for four months to Calladine.

Evening after evening they sat opposite to one another over the fire at Starvecrow. Often they played chess,—a pastime to which he seemed tirelessly addicted.

He would rarely go out; he shivered and said that it was cold,—it was true that snow lay upon the Downs and that the wind blew incessantly,—and why should a man face the bitter cold of March when no necessity compelled him and when a pleasant fire could console him within doors? Nor did he like her going out without him. So they stayed in, until she felt that she could have sent walls and ceiling flying by one extravagant gesture of her arms.

But he,—oh, how content he was! He had lost his melancholy; he had brought out for her benefit from cases and cupboards numerous objects wherewith to beautify their rooms, but her inability to distinguish among the various artists was a source of infinitesimal friction between them; “No, no, my dear; *Clodion*, not *Houdon*,” he would say, and she would accept the correction meekly with a little laugh implying that the matter was not of very great importance after

all, and with that little laugh would undo all the merit of her meekness.

At first he had enjoyed making these corrections. It flattered him to think that he had brought into an atmosphere of artistic refinement this child of the hills whose knowledge although so thorough as far as it went, was concerned with such rude things as rocks and skulls and antlers, supplemented by a working experience of shepherds' and woodman's lore. Certainly he had always been ready to take an interest in Mr. Warrener's work, and to entertain a respectful admiration for the old gentleman's scholarship, but that was a different matter: it was a tabulated profession, archæology was a branch of study suitable to gentlemen, especially old gentlemen; Mr. Warrener contributed papers to the journals of several societies; he was a distinguished and accepted authority. That was quite another matter. It had been amusing, even, to find Clare dabbling her fingers in the same research; amusing to hear the terms so glib upon her lips; surprisingly instructive, sometimes, to catch the odd bits of information she let fall while out riding with him on the Downs. But what had been amusing in the child was insufficient, even unbecoming, in the married woman. To dilettantism, *per se*, he had no objection; he was a believer in dilettantism; but in the name of all good taste let it be dilettantism in graceful and becoming subjects! So he tried to interest Clare in *terres cuites*, in crystals and

in the bindings of books. She looked at them at first with pleasure, they were exquisite; she had never seen such things before, or suspected their existence; she exclaimed over them, marvelled at their workmanship, fingered them, discovered new loveliness in them as she turned them this way and that. Calladine was enchanted by her appreciation; he thought he might venture further; he tempted her with subtler baits. But she returned to the fragile eighteenth century statuettes. He let her have her way, tolerant, determined not to force her interest. He watched her. There was about the little terra cotta groups a false paganism, a windy grace, that intrigued and allured her. Here was something that she could nearly understand; nearly, if not quite; not quite, for there was still something, or the lack of something, which troubled her; she could not put a name to it, consider how she might, with a pucker between her brows. These dimpled children, with the thighs and hoofs of goats,—these girls with draperies blown by the wind at the moment when the sculptor caught and fixed them motionless for ever,—these young men with slanting eyes and laughing mouths,—of what did they remind her? and in what were they so evasively deficient? She circled round the table on which they stood. Calladine's eyes followed her in amusement. She was puzzled, this nymph who was so much more like a nymph than any nymph that Clodion ever made, puzzled by the drawing-room *fa*

*roucherie* of these false fugitives. "A little self-conscious, you find them?" he had murmured at last.

But the artistic education of Clare proved a game that had palled. She had gone clean through his objects of virtue, and had come out the other side. She seemed to have been briefly deluded by them, then to have sized them up, to have detected their essential fraud, and to have discarded them from her interest. Mortified though he was, he perceived somewhere in himself a respect for her pure, uneducated instinct. Still, as this was a thing he could not, out of self-respect, admit, he continued at intervals his efforts to guide her feet into the paths he himself found so pleasant. He liked to sit within doors re-ordering his books and his treasures, while the snow drifted up against the windows and the wind cried unappeasably across the Downs. "Why are you staring out at that ugly landscape, Clare? Don't you like the fire better, and a chair, and a book to read?" But she read very seldom; only once, when she had been reading, he saw to his consternation that tears were falling silently down her cheeks, and, going up behind her, he had seen over her shoulder that Shelley lay open on her knee:

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear,  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee,  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share  
The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O uncontrollable! . . .

"Clare, why so silent? I declare, you've grown more meditative than I,—where's your irresponsibility? is the dignity of marriage so heavy upon you? Were you as silent with your friend Lovel? didn't you prattle to *him*? eh, tell me?"

"What funny questions you ask, Richard. Lovel? I don't remember. No, I don't think I ever talked much to Lovel."

"Well, but in all those hours you spent, riding with him, fishing, and I don't know what else. . . ."

"Well, we were busy, Richard; too busy to talk."

"And he was a common fellow, wasn't he? it's not to be expected you would have talked much to him? eh?"

"He certainly wasn't fine like you, Richard."

"Now how do you mean that? Too fine, am I? And he,—a poacher, wasn't he? a bit of good-for-nothing? You don't answer. A queer fellow, not without good looks; oh, I wouldn't deny him that. A romantical sort of fellow, Clare?"

"Practical as he could be, on the contrary."

"Maybe; none the less, there was something romantical about him . . ."

So he tormented himself by this small constant nagging about Lovel, liking to dress the man's personality up in the lyrical words of his own choosing; but for the rest he appeared satisfied, living with Clare a captive under his roof.

But sometimes she eluded his company. Then he roamed about the house, up and down stairs, out at the front door, down to the little wicket gate in the new wall, holding his muffler close under his chin, for the wind tore at his coverings, tweaking his scarf, flapping his coat, freezing his fingers, blowing his grey hair about in wild strands. He stood at the little gate, vainly trying to smooth his hair, gazing round the expanse of the hills, and calling from time to time as loudly as he could call, "Clare!" The wind took his voice and dispersed it like smoke; instantly tattered, it streamed away on the wind. No hope that Clare should hear that futile call, and it seemed to him that the empty Downs must from her childhood onwards have accumulated the echoes of voices crying "Clare! Clare!" A bell-like and doleful name, so cried; a name made to ring out; a wailing appeal; a name to cry after a gay truant, knowing that no answer would be returned. A gay truant, marked out for tragedy, dancing away, while those who remained behind cried after her and broke their hearts.

All his complacency dropped from him, he stood at the gate, looking and calling; then turning back to the house he sought her again in every room, even up to the attic where Phoebe Batch, startled at his intrusion and dishevelled appearance, gaped at her master and stammered out her, "No, sir,"—she had seen nothing of Mrs. Calladine. Mrs. Calladine! She was



Clare, just Clare; Calladine with a bitter twist could not at that moment associate her with the respectable title. He turned away, downstairs again, and back to the front door, to stand on the doorstep, gazing across the little garden, over the low wall, up to the pale inhospitable hills.

She returned, of course; every time she duly returned; and he upbraided her, and almost wept, but she said nothing, only looked at him with wide eyes, indifferent and remote. He upbraided her more loudly, even shook her on one occasion and "Don't stand there," he cried, "as though you had left your wits out in the blizzard," and he flacked his fingers in his hysteria, and his voice grew shrill. But after a little while he would quieten down, and his melancholy would return, and he would sit with his head in his hands, saying that for his unhappiness he had married an elf and not a woman.

Clare looked at him, sitting sunk in his chair, and presently she would thaw, as though those wits which he said she had left out in the blizzard were creeping back little by little into her body, and then she would put her hand kindly on his head and tell him not to fret. But that was all the explanation or comfort he ever got, to his great exasperation, being a man who liked to know how his wife had occupied every moment of her time,—to know, indeed, every thought which passed through her head.

Fortunately for himself, he soon forgot; the

next morning he would descend, serene as ever, and set himself after his breakfast to his usual mild pursuits. Only in a sudden suspicious glance shot at Clare would his anxiety reawaken, and he would look at her feet, to see whether she wore her black strapped shoes and white stockings, peeping out under the fulness of her skirt. And sometimes, for a day or two after one of her escapades,—her evasions, as he called them in his own mind,—he would follow her upstairs if she went up to her bedroom.

Inquiringly she looked at him.

“Yes, Richard?”—for she was always gentle, save when she gazed past him with that far-away look, that seemed to range the Downs though her husband’s body and the walls of the house stood in her way,—“Yes, Richard?”

He mumbled, half-ashamed.

“I came to see what you were doing . . .” He could not bring himself to say, “I came to see whether you were changing your shoes,” for that seemed ridiculous, beneath his dignity.

He had his happy moments. Sitting in his little room with her after they had dined, in the firelight, he beheld the very picture he had so often imagined. He had got her there, for his own; and his eyes rested long upon her grace, travelling, with delicate sensuality, over her young body and the little hands lying idle along the arms of her chair. “You never sew, my Clare,” he observed to her once, regretting this,

for he luxuriated in all the pretty attributes of woman. She smiled at him. "What are you thinking of?"—his favourite question, and he bent forward to pick up her limp hand and fondle it. "Tell me what you were thinking," he repeated jealously.

For once she lifted frank eyes and gave a frank answer.

"I was wondering how much real need you had of me, Richard."

"Remember the man I was before you came to me," he said reproachfully, yet with a certain pride in recalling the gloom which had been his to discard.

Then she said no more,—a trick of hers, which irritated him when he would fain have had her explain and amplify. He liked argument, he liked analysis; and into neither could he draw her.

"How unwillingly," he said, "do you dwell upon personal relationships!"

He had lost his gloom and melancholy,—or was it that he had begun to think that hobby ridden to death, sometimes inconvenient to himself and possibly diminishing in impressiveness to other people, and had welcomed his marriage as a plausible reason for abjuring it? His habitual manner he had not altered; he still maintained towards her the same elaborate courtesy and his air of rather patronising protectiveness, as though thanks to the one conven-

tion, he revered her, and thanks to the other, condescended.

Yet, he had changed; changed from the very day of their marriage. He had paraded her on his arm before their wedding-guests, the smile had wandered perpetually over his lips, he had abandoned his slight stoop, he had straightened himself up into a handsome and possessive bridegroom. She had been too apathetic at heart to be nettled by his so parading her in public: "My wife," the formula constantly on his lips, had not stirred her resentment; those were the outward shows,—they could not touch her secret being. And, looking at him perhaps nevertheless with a faint surprise, she had ascribed this new manner to his natural triumph at getting her, and had expected a relapse as soon as the novelty should have staled into habit. But there had been no relapse. He had brought her home to Starvecrow, and then she had realised how all the new chintzes, the curtains in the windows, the works of art brought out from the drawers where all these years they had lain concealed, had been but the preparation for this long-schemed change in his mode of thought. They slipped now into their place, they came into their own, small but significant. He had at last now an excuse for shedding with relief the strenuous manner of years. There remained no work for her to do.

Oh, little objects of art and skill. What hours he must have spent trifling with their suavity,

taking them from their hiding-places of an evening after he had heard Mrs. Quince go safely up to bed, and knew that no one was looking, no one likely to break in upon him and surprise him at his comfortable pottering; the hours of mansuetude he must have spent turning and caressing them between his fine sensitive hands! He had not brought out those little objects to show her the day she had gone to tea with him at Starvecrow; oh no! the only thing he had brought out had been the drawing of that woman's head, which he had so dramatically destroyed in her presence. She saw that destruction now as the first step taken towards his emancipation. But the little objects he had not shown her,—those delicate fraudulent statuettes in terra cotta, those chiselled and prismatic crystals. How bare, how cheerless she had thought his room! those heavy leather armchairs, now so jaunty with chintz! She had pitied him, genuinely and kindly, even through her impatience at his mismanagement of his life. She had chided herself for any passing suspicions that his gloom might be deliberate. And she had seen in her marriage with him an opportunity to perform, supremely at her own expense, a task perhaps worth performing.

But what right had she to murmur, when she saw her intentions crumble? She had, indeed, achieved her object, albeit in a manner so disconcertingly unforeseen. She reproached herself, in her mind which gave no quarter, any

more than Lovel gave quarter; she reproached herself for not rendering thanks that her task had been thus made easy. What! she dare to murmur because she had been spared the strain of months, even of years? because she had not been permitted to string herself up to an effort daily renewed, an exertion in which her own weariness must never for an instant be allowed to appear? because Calladine had taken the law out of her hands, and had ordained for himself the resurrection to which she had intended to force him? She looked back with the smile of rueful irony to her brave and pitiful plans for his redemption. She had intended,—so gallantly—to set her back for ever towards her old life. She would have devoted herself,—so sturdily,—to the man who had need of her. She would not have flagged. The vision of her married life had disclosed itself during the weeks of her engagement in detail to her anticipation. There was no detail she had shirked,—not even the least picturesque. She had not tried to idealise Calladine; no, rather she had tried to see him in the light that Lovel's careless scorn had thrown; not as a romantic figure, blasted by the catastrophe of an early passion, but as an incompetent, bungling, pitiable figure. Her pity, her charity, and her contempt would between them have carried her through. But now that she found herself forestalled, as it were,—found that Calladine had already accomplished for himself precisely what she had intended to accomplish for



him,—she was disconcerted, almost angry. It was in vain that she upbraided herself for her own ingratitude. The life that she had planned for herself was not falling out according to her design. She was cheated; a person who has tried to take in the dark a step that was never there. Let her keep her sense of proportion,—her refuge now, her only refuge,—and she would not even yet be wholly lost. Then she could laugh at the futility of her plans; she could see, as from without, their derision, and their full pitifulness. Her life at Starvecrow had not fallen out according to her design. What of it?

A woman spending thirty, forty, wasted years in a forgotten corner of the Downs. What of it?

Her memory would not cling about the place after she should be dead, any more than the memory of victims clung about the sacrificial stones. “Here blood was shed,” but that was a collective phrase; all individuality had long since, —almost immediately,—been telescoped into the clemency of perspective. So it would be with her, and she saw herself already as part of that anonymous crowd, whether of the victims of a savage creed, or of the women with the wasted lives,—no sublime and legendary sorrow, except in so far that all sorrow shared in the same great dignity,—women who had lost children or lovers, women who had trailed ill-health about their daily business, women who had borne the long, mute burden of uncertainty, all the grey, silent,

muffled women that whispered round her, and that had taken to their graves unchronicled the blunt or the poignant sorrow of their hearts.

Nameless, they lived for her now. For her now, the Downs, hitherto so void and so spacious under the freedom of the winds and the cycle of the seasons, for her now the Downs were peopled. Their dewes were brushed dark with footsteps. Their heights were scanned by searching eyes. Their flanks were bruised by the stumble of weary limbs. Their beech-clumps were threaded with the breath of secrets. She had not known, at first, whether to resent or to welcome the looming-up of this hushed population. It seemed to her that they rose up out of the ground, stealthy, ashen, tall. They were everywhere about her. They had known the Downs as she knew them, and the changing seasons had found as they did for her either a significant echo or an incongruous irony in their souls. Their presence did away with the loneliness, the untouched and indifferent loneliness of the uplands, which in her egoism she had seen as a background to her life and Lovel's populated only, in so far as they were populated at all, by the rough figures of the men of barbarous ages, men who fought for the simple preservation of their own existence, undivided by any shredding of their moods, whose religion was one of fear and not of charity, the men who had set up the stones and raised the barrows in order to propitiate the dark Unknown of creation and

of death with such rude pomp as they could devise. They had been stark, striding elementary figures, one with the tree-trunks and the sarsen stones. They had ennobled the Downs by the record of their constructions. It had seemed to Clare that the intervening centuries between their age and the present day had been blank,—that she inherited the Downs direct from their hands,—those Downs which revealed themselves to her eyes unchanged from the hour when the stone men had passed away from them. The barrows, the dew-ponds, the Grey Wethers, the green tracks, the hawks and the larks, the space,—all unaltered; the stone men, returning, would find no change. What had she said, long ago, to Calladine, “an old, hard country; and such ghosts as there are, are bleached bones by now, dry and clean. I think,” she had said, “that the ghosts that walk among the stones must be as stern as the stones themselves; and that’s my fancy.”

And now there came to her this newly-realised population, bruised by life down to the softness of humanity. As to her those dry, bleached ghosts of the rude ages were masculine, so those more human ghosts that rose up out of the centuries were feminine. Increasingly, they had splintered their emotions; they had departed from the stark, simple facts; they had become more complex and more wistful. The stars and the stones had meant less and less to them; the Man of Sorrows, and not the terrible orbs of

heaven, had been their god. They were kneaded, malleable. They had endured much, but in the full consciousness of endurance; their spirit, even if not their voice, had groaned under the load of life and its ironies; they had not accepted as a matter of course, unquestioning, a lot that was hard. For all that, they had not been the less courageous; perhaps even their courage had been of a sublimer brand. And they were women, women, always women. The men had remained nearer to the old, strong, practical stock,—the purveyors of necessities. It was upon the women that civilisation had had the most effect. Calladine himself, the most highly civilised man that Clare knew, had always seemed to her instinct more like a woman,—sitting in his house and picking his griefs into smaller and smaller pieces. But Calladine's griefs were not very real griefs,—she knew that now. She knew that he was, really, quite negligible.

She had been almost afraid, for a brief period, to go out upon the Downs,—afraid of forms rising up round her, of hands pulling at her garments, and of eyes seeking hers until she was forced to look into their depths. It was not that she any longer felt resentment against the population her own imagination had evoked; no, the Downs were enriched by their company, and the calm heights acquired a new significance by contrast with their soft rustling tumult. It was that she feared the knowledge which would come to her if she spent many hours alone with those

ghostly inhabitants whispering round her like dead leaves; she feared what she would learn; she would not probe her new half-guessed discovery. Things were a degree less terrible so long as they remained without a name.

But she could not fear for long. She had pushed them back, averting her head, into the shadows, and there they had taken up their abode. They would not leave her again. Not even in the midst of joy,—if joy should ever visit,—would they leave her, any more than the shadows were ever completely absent even in the midst of sunshine on the Downs. She was grateful to them for the way they had come, stealing in upon her, silent and gradual, not in a sudden irruption that would have broken her. But now that she no longer feared them, no longer feared the learning that solitude might bring, it was for solitude that she craved, and solitude, she found, was the thing that she might not have. Calladine, who was so content in her company, expected that she should be equally content in his. When she went out, he went with her; when he was not inclined to go out, he begged that she would remain at home. “It is a rough day, Clare; let us stay happily by the fire.” Or he would consent to pace the garden, sheltered now by a little wall, and together they would look at the bare winter beds, and he would talk cheerfully of the flowers that would blow there in the spring.

She renounced the Downs. Since she might

not wander there alone, she restricted herself to the house and the square of garden, or to the green track that led to King's Avon when she went to see her father. Even on this expedition Calladine accompanied her. He did not notice that she walked with her eyes bent upon the ground, never allowing them to lift and stray over the rolling country; or if he noticed he gave no sign. All the time he talked of minor things, and to his talk she made adequate response. Arrived at King's Avon she would quicken her steps and pass rapidly down the village street, glancing about her only sufficiently to acknowledge the greetings of her humble acquaintances, and only when safe within the Manor House gates would she relax a little, and show herself gentle and affectionate towards her father, who, absent as ever, would presently forget that she was married and would invite Calladine to remain to dinner, "Clare and I, my dear friend, may so rarely welcome a visitor." Through her laughter she looked at him wistfully; he was dear and familiar, his old beehive hat as wide and as shabby as ever, his spectacles still on his nose and his mild blue eyes looking out through them. She wondered how he got on without her, but Martha told her he did not seem to notice her absence much; only once, she had found him in Miss Clare's old bedroom, wandering round, and touching everything in a gently puzzled way. Clare was glad that he should continue his busy, happy existence. Martha she



could trust, "To be sure, Miss Clare, I look after him as though he was your own baby. It's all I can do, not to powder him after his bath." But she sometimes fancied that his eyes followed her a little sorrowfully down the avenue when she went away, as he stood watching their departure and waving his big silk handkerchief.

And they would set off on their homeward journey up the village street, along the road through the cut in the embankment, and along the road until it dissolved into the green track that led across the Downs. Still with her eyes upon the ground she walked rapidly, as though anxious to find herself once more safe within the shelter of Starvecrow. Calladine's long legs easily kept pace with her; and she had the impression that, even were she to run, she could never escape from him. He strode beside her, talking of her father, talking of those minor things which, she had found, occupied so much of his attention, and always with the assumption that her interest equalled his own. Once or twice he wanted to leave the track and make their way home across country, but when he suggested this she always pretexted her anxiety to be once more ensconced in their own room. This invariably pleased him, and he acquiesced. She could not, no, she could not, stray across the Downs with him.

She renounced the Downs. She could not share them with Calladine; not even with his mere physical presence could she share them.

She cramped herself within the house and the little garden. The moment came when Calladine commented upon it. "Don't you want to go for a walk, Clare?" She did not;—she clung to their meagre patch of cultivation. "You are grown quite stay-at-home," he prodded, fondly.

The great Downs,—that stealthy population out on the Downs. Waiting for her,—the call of nature, always, and now the call of humanity. Out there, she could respond, she could feel, she could learn. Once she had not wanted to learn. She had shirked knowledge. Now, she had acquired knowledge, and could bear a yet deeper learning. She was avid, indeed, for the deepest draught of knowledge. Those bare great Downs, they were not bare; they were peopled. She might learn the first lesson from their storm, and the ultimate lesson from their serenity. But it was not in Calladine's company that she would learn it. Such lessons were learnt in the severest solitude, with the senses of the soul stripped to flagellation.

Therefore she clung to Starvecrow. "An uncouth name," said Calladine discontentedly, after relishing it for years; "shall we change it?" But she begged him not to, without clearly knowing why. "Very well, we keep it," said Calladine, smiling down at her, "as a contrast to the snug life we live beneath that uncomfortable label." She smiled back; she could smile, always; it had become mechanical, costing her little. She clung to Starvecrow, without affection, but also

without anything so precise as distaste; it, like Calladine, was negligible really, and she had never gone back on her first opinion of it,—that it was not austere enough to excuse its barrenness, and merely mean in its lack of comfort. It was no different from the Manor House, which, although at first sight incongruous perhaps in the midst of the village and its barbarous temple, was in truth no more incongruous than her old father, who pottered in his big hat about the garden, or peered through his big spectacles at the shards set out upon his desk.

But still she clung to Starvecrow; it was just bleak enough to match the bleak, small disaster of her life; just comfortless enough to accord with the blank at the root of her life with Calladine.

There had been the days of her engagement, when convention demanded that she should go over and at least appear to take an interest in her future home. She had gone, driven by Calladine himself through the village in the high dog-cart; holding on to her hat she had gone, rattling along the lanes behind the raw-boned animal, the gig rocking slightly from side to side, and the low branches of the trees almost sweeping against her as they passed. Calladine had looked fondly down upon her holding on to her hat, and in response to his murmur as he bent down towards her, she had looked up, and thought, in a detached way, that he was agreeable to look at, very gentlemanly and rather in-

teresting, with his sallow, high-bred face, his many-caped driving coat, and his fine skilful hands encased in his gauntlets. She wondered, in the same detached fashion, what it would feel like when he stood tall by her side, and she could say "my husband." Already she had had little foretastes of it, when he accompanied her to the village shops, and the shopkeepers said, in their familiar, respectful way, with an admiring gaze at the couple, "Here's our best wishes, I'm sure, Miss Clare, to you and your gentleman." And they had come to Starvecrow, where Mrs. Quince was waiting to receive them, and for all the smiles and curtseys and the insistence that Clare should inspect every cupboard, Clare had been conscious of the hostility of the elderly woman. But she had gone,—gone all over the house under the escort of Mrs. Quince, accompanied by Calladine as far as the first floor, where with his elaborate deferential manner he had retired, conveying by all that he left unsaid, that women were best left to themselves over household matters. There was in the manner of his retirement the indefinable condescension which to Clare was so subtly irritating. A wholesome male contempt she could more easily have pardoned. . . . But she had not stopped to think of that, in her dismay at finding herself alone with Mrs. Quince; she needed all her wits to balance the tension between herself and the housekeeper. Mrs. Quince seemed determined to outrage down to the least detail of her own feelings; all the doors

of her most sacred cupboards were thrown open with a jingling of keys, and their immaculate depths revealed to Clare, who, her criticism being all the time slavishly invited, could respond with nothing but approval. "Though I am sure, miss, there's many a thing in this house not carried out according to your ideas." Mrs. Quince, indeed, seemed so anxious to be found fault with, that Clare, feeling that she must exhibit her own competence or forfeit from the outset the housekeeper's respect, at last did offer some small disparaging comment. "Ah, there, what did I tell you?" said Mrs. Quince instantly, as though satisfied to have got finally what she had been expecting all along; "'tis not likely that old eyes and young ones should always see alike." After this her urbanity and her constant return to the point that Clare had condemned became so excessive that Clare devoutly wished she might have forfeited all Mrs. Quince's esteem for ever only not to be pursued by this constant reference and exaggerated subservience. And Mrs. Quince would spare her nothing, but led her up to the second storey, where, pausing on a landing carpeted with coarse matting and lit by a small skylight, she explained that "the girl" slept. Clare shrank; "Oh, no, Mrs. Quince, don't disturb her if she is in her room." "Indeed, and why not, miss?" said Mrs. Quince stoutly, advancing towards the door; "'tis only her room on sufferance, as you might say; and likely there would be something you would wish altered." She threw

open the door as she spoke, and Daisy Morland, rising in confusion, let fall on to the ground the scraps of white linen at which she had been stitching.

Clare recoiled on the threshold; she had known that Daisy Morland was in the house, but had not expected to come face to face with her. Nor had Daisy expected to see Clare,—whose arrival with Calladine she had watched on tiptoe from her little dormer window,—thus ushered into her room. The mischievous eye of Mrs. Quince superintended the clash between the two girls. She had manœuvred ably; she congratulated herself. Daisy,—Daisy was curtsying,—had recovered herself so far as to remember her curtsy,—what gall, what mockery, was in that curtsy!—Miss Warrener,—Miss Warrener was nodding to her,—saying something about “nice little room,” and looking sideways all the time at the pieces of linen fallen on the floor. Mrs. Quince folded her arms and superintended. She wore a smile,—outwardly benevolent, inwardly immensely ironical. The two girls,—much of an age. Daisy, blowsy and flustered, hardly able to repress her jeer; Clare, cool and wounded, but too proud to betray her wound. A lady: Mrs. Quince paid her that grudging acknowledgment. Well, Daisy had got the gipsy fellow, and Miss Warrener had got Mr. Calladine. As it should be.

They came out of the room together, Clare and Mrs. Quince. Mrs. Quince drew back a lit-



tle, respectfully, to let her go first, and closed the door gently behind her. "I wouldn't have taken you in there miss," she began, "if I'd known what that shameless baggage was to be at,—stitching away at her own baby's clothes a fortnight before her marriage. Perhaps I should not say such things to you,—but there, you'll be married yourself before the month's out. And I wouldn't have kept Daisy Morland here, knowing about her what I do know now, but that I wanted to have the house well set to rights against your coming, and, thought I, why not make use of a pair of hands that'll never do a turn of work again for honest folks, but only for herself and a shame-begotten brat and a 'scape-the-gallows husband. It's a hard bit of luck for Farmer Morland and his wife," continued Mrs. Quince as she followed Clare down the stairs, "after they brought their girl up decent; but what can you expect with such poachers and loafers and gipsy-like stuff hanging about the village? 'Twas the easiest thing in the world for Daisy to go sweethearting on the hills, and what with shepherds' huts and hurdles handy there was all the chance of a bit of trouble. Well, and now she's got it, and lucky for her, *I* say, that Lovel's ready to turn her into an honest woman, for there's many stouter bred than him that hasn't stuck to their girls, and I always say . . ." Here Calladine had come out of the sitting-room, hearing the sound of voices; he came pleasantly towards them, rubbing his hands together and

bending towards Clare, "Tired, my dear? tired? a little bit, I think,—too bad, too bad, Mrs. Quince, we've tired her out between us; well, come in here and rest in this big chair . . ." he pressed her into the sitting-room, and Mrs. Quince with much solicitude settled cushions for her and placed her feet upon a footstool in spite of all Clare's protests.

She had dreaded to find Daisy still at Starve-crow when she returned there after her marriage. It would have been simple for her to find out, but she lacked the courage to ask. And would Calladine know? would he know if one girl rather than another slept in the attic at the top of his house? She could have asked Martha Sparrow, but pride withheld her from making enquiries as to Lovel's wedding. True, Mrs. Quince had mentioned a fortnight, but she did not trust Mrs. Quince; the elderly woman would relish laying a trap for her. But at the end of the fortnight she had known that Mrs. Quince had spoken accurately, for Martha Sparrow, coming into her room to call her that morning and whisking back the curtains along the curtain-rods, had said cheerfully, "A fine day for the gipsy's wedding; and I wonder how many of the folk will turn out to see the customs a common Christian wouldn't practise?"

But those folk, skulking round the church, had been disappointed. They had seen no swarthy women in scarlet handkerchiefs, no dark men with little gold rings in their ears. They had

heard no gibberish, and seen no gestures of incantation or abracadabra. They had seen only Nicholas Lovel in his ordinary clothes, inaccessiblely severe, with his young woman, all simpers and dimples, on his arm; and Olver Lovel in the nave, watching the scene at the altar, obliquely in that queer little round mirror he always seemed to carry. Not even the Lovels' old mother had they seen; and for a glimpse of her they had greatly hoped, for surely, even of a witch and a gipsy, it might be expected that she would turn out to witness the marriage of her own son. But no, she had not caused herself to be wheeled as far as the church, the bedridden old woman; and, indignant because they were disappointed of their spectacle, the village folk muttered, "Unnatural,—but what would you expect?"

Disappointed though they were, they had remained to watch the ceremony. Some of the bolder spirits had gone to the church, edging their way, sheepish but defiant, along the pews; but the majority had crowded near the door, peeping, nudging, jostling backwards whenever Lovel up at the altar threatened to turn round. There had been none of the coarse, friendly atmosphere that surrounded most village weddings. There had been, instead, an atmosphere of curiosity and fear; and at Daisy looks were thrown, full of commiseration and a fearful respect, by the villagers as at one of their own comfortable number, about to cut herself adrift from them and to become enrolled among an alien community.

They fully expected that Daisy, hitherto so plump and jolly and normal, would be initiated into dark rites beyond their imagination when once she had been swallowed up into the shadows of the dim, tunnel-like passage of the Lovels' house and the Lovels' door closed behind her. They never expected to see her emerge again in precisely the semblance of herself familiar to them. Or would Lovel deny his secrets even to his wife? Would he keep her there, in his dark house, as a servant and a convenience, to wait on his old mother, to cook his meals and obey his behests, and above all things to hold her tongue as to all the unexplained things she might happen to witness in the course of years? Would she be no more than a terrorized servant in that house they thought so vaguely sinister? There was Olver Lovel, too; was he a sort of accomplice to his brother, a sort of sly malignant accomplice, who in his brother's absence would bully his brother's wife by deputed authority, so that she would be at the mercy not only of the elder Lovel, who was an unknown quantity if ever there was one, but against whom nothing but his practices in defiance of the game laws was definitely known,—not only would she be at his hard mercy, but also at that of his younger brother, of whom the blackest and most cunning arts might be believed. There were a hundred ways, they decided, talking it over between a horrid fascination and a still more horrid relish, in which Olver might exercise his nasty talents upon

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Daisy. John Sparrow even went so far as to predict that the day would come when she would be found wandering, as crazy as Olver himself, upon the Downs, but others more sagely replied that if indeed she were to lose her wits she would never be allowed to escape from the house. And that opened up another series of pictures, in which Daisy, crazed and foolishly happy, went about her work singing little ditties, and the door of the dark house was closed daily by Lovel upon the three inmates, the mother, the brother, and the wife, and the key lay close within his pocket.

But in the meantime the spectacle before their eyes was quite different from those evoked by their imaginations. It might be true that Lovel looked lean and stern, and that Olver followed the ceremony in that slanting way within his little round mirror, but the words the clergyman uttered were the same that they were accustomed to hear at all respectable unions, and as for Daisy, she was the picture of all a bride ought to be, muslin flounces and coyness, and if her figure was a little oddly thickened, why, that also was a thing that had been seen before at village weddings. She looked pleased with her young man; she kept glancing proudly at his height; she sniggered with content as he repeated the beautiful threadbare words after the priest, repeated them gravely and firmly, but as though he were utterly indifferent to the obligations they imposed upon him. There was nothing very startlingly unusual about the wedding. True, neither Daisy's

father nor her mother were present, but the whole village knew that Lovel was marrying the girl because he had got her into trouble, and it was not likely that the Morlands, steady and decent folk, would be present to give the sanction of their approval. Perhaps later on, when the child was born, they might come round; for the moment, no doubt,—and very naturally,—they were sore over both the cause of the marriage and the son-in-law imposed upon them. Daisy did not seem to care. Ever since the publication of her banns she had gone about flaunting as though her marriage were a reason for pride rather than for shame and apology. Not that the village saw much shame in circumstances so common. It had, rather, a certain respect for Daisy, who, having set her heart on the gipsy,—a strange taste, but that was her business,—had at last got him to the altar. There was a tacit convention that a girl was justified in using all her weapons if she could not otherwise carry her point: and there was also, in the present instance, a peculiar satisfaction in feeling that the gipsy had been worsted. So grand, so stuck-up, Nicholas Lovel, but a girl had got the better of him in the end.

When the bridal pair came out of the vestry and preceeded down the aisle, there was a scattering in the little crowd at the church door; a lane opened, and Lovel and his wife passed out between the craning, curious faces. Lovel looked neither to left nor to right; his arm was



crooked to allow Daisy's hand to rest within it, but that was the only concession he made to his newly-married state. She, on the contrary, sought eagerly for the faces of her friends; she dragged upon Lovel's arm, but he moved unyielding forward. Daisy, who was trying to lag, had to take a little run, like a child that cannot keep pace with the advance of a grown-up person. With her head half-turned, her eyes still lingered over the little crowd that was once more closing in behind them. There were not many girls in the party; she knew why, and a sense of triumph came over her; they might affect to despise Lovel, but for all that they did not care to see him married to one of their own number,—ah, how clever she had been!—not many girls; two men, doddering on their sticks; and a group of young men, the lounging, insolent handsome young men, with their hands stuck into the belts of their smocks, chewing straws for all the world as though they had been in the Waggon of Hay and not on the threshold of a church. It was then that an incident occurred, the recollection of which was frequently to dash Daisy's triumph into a sinking of uneasiness; towering behind the group she caught sight of Peter Gorwyn's grinning, good-humoured face on the top of his enormous proportions, and as she looked at him in a sort of terror of recognition that *he* of all men should have come to attend her wedding, he very slowly winked, so slowly that time seemed to be suspended between the beginning of the wink

and the completion of it; and in that suspension of time, while her eyes had leisure to dwell in fascination upon the subtle and quite unambiguous process of a wink, her mind had leisure also to take in its whole significance: Peter Gorwyn *knew*. In that wink the day of the Scouring was evoked; the fun they had shared; the irresponsibility, the momentary drunkenness. There was no reproach in the wink; there was no reproof; there was not even a threat; there was simply the amusement of a confederate, of one who knew himself quite well to be a party to a hoax. There was humour in it too; in that broad, ruddy face and blue eyes there was humour; there was even congratulation, a kind of silent applause; and a hint of gratitude to Daisy for having let him off so easily,—for having got Lovel to stand there in his place. This was all very re-assuring; there was such a phrase as honour among thieves, and big Peter, with her, was a thief if he was willing to let Lovel take his place and pay the price which should have been exacted of his own responsibility. But at the same time that wink came as a sharp shock to her, the shock that a second person shared her hoaxing secret. She thought that presently, when she had had time to settle down a little in her new life, she would catch young Gorwyn for an interview, and, without giving herself away, make quite sure, that, although he had guessed what she had concealed, he was ready to grin and hold his tongue. She thought this in a flustered way, as

she came out of the church on Lovel's arm into the warmth of the sunny morning, and they proceeded down the path between the grave-stones, a stiff little group, robbed momentarily even of the slight relief of the bride's simpering, with Olver bringing up the rear. Daisy shivered for the first time; this wedding was not being conducted according to her idea of weddings; there were no emotional relatives, no weeping mother, no bells pealing from the calm grey spire overhead, no bridesmaids, no best man,—only Olver shambling behind them as they proceeded between the grave-stones, Olver so slightly and indefinitely mis-shapen, a solitary evil attendant, shambling as though he might at any moment break into a fawning gambol around them, a senseless dance full of irony and mischief. And Lovel, himself, dearly as she had set her heart upon him, was throwing a chill by his demeanour over the occasion; he had not once looked at her, he had offered her his arm in a coldly civil way,—less he could not do,—he had stood up stern and unbending; she was afraid of him, and discouragement began to cloud over her triumph.

They were walking now down the street towards his house, and the shopkeepers came to their doors to stare at them as they passed. Still Lovel marched on, undeviating, and Daisy began to feel herself a captive being led towards her prison. She clasped her fingers tigher round Lovel's arm; it was hard and sinewy, typical of his lean strength. Here was a harshness she

would find tough to propitiate; and jealousy shot through her; had he shown himself harsh towards Miss Warrener? or had she discovered an unguessed marvellous Lovel? What secret understanding had they shared? Daisy scarcely understood the pain. "The minx!" she muttered; it was the only analysis she could find of her sudden twist of anguish, blind and inarticulate. Up to the present she had been too much occupied with securing Lovel; in future she would have leisure to dwell upon those memories of his which would lie for ever concealed from her. "We're married now, aren't we, Nicholas? I've got you?" she said, looking up into his face.

He took her into his house, where during the whole time of their engagement he had never allowed her to come. They were in the dark cold passage, at the end of which, in the sun, opened the little square of garden where Lovel like any other cottager grew his cabbages, his patch of flowers, his gooseberries, and his beans. Daisy became excited again; she forgot Gorwyn, she forgot her discouragement and her jealousy; she was a woman brought for the first time to her home. She peered about her with interest, while Lovel shut the door, and the passage became quite dark but for the door at the further end opening bright arch-wise on to the garden. "Oh, Nicholas," she said, "I can't see and it's cold; leave open the door." "For all the village to spy in upon us?" he returned, and she perceived that in this as in everything else he would

have his way. "It's more friendly," she ventured, but he did not move towards it, and she desisted: after all, she had got him, she had fooled him, the score so far was heavily in her favour; if she let him have his way now, she would get him more completely in the end. "It's rather cold," she said nevertheless, repressing a shiver, and, hearing a small chuckle in the shadows behind her, she turned and saw Olver crouched up against the wall.

"Take me into the kitchen!" she cried, pressing herself against Lovel.

Kitchen! the word was reassuring; her mother had kept a spruce, spacious kitchen, where bottled fruit stood ranged on shelves, and trays of floury scones stood on the scrubbed deal table, and the big Parliament clock tick-tocked in comfortable regularity against the wall. Very different was the room to which Lovel sarcastically admitted her; she stopped with the dismay of the conventional person suddenly confronted with rebel views. She was shocked as at something unseemly and profane. "Oh," she cried, "but this isn't a kitchen?"

She turned as though to make her escape; before her was the room with its walls of rough stone, its rafters, shadows and cobwebs, behind her was Lovel in the doorway and the dark passage beyond him, with Olver crouching in it. She stared round her, and was met everywhere by silence. "I don't like it!" she cried in shrill terror. Lovel continued to look at her without

speaking. "Mother! dad!" she cried, "I want to go home!" She rushed to Lovel and beat her hands against his chest. His physical contact recalled her, and she began to sob. "Nicholas, Nicholas," she sobbed, "I love you, I don't understand." She sobbed against him.

He stood still, hard and carven, while the waves of her panic broke over him. Presently a loud tapping sounded overhead, and she raised her face, mouth moist and wide open, to listen. "What's that?" she uttered. "My mother," he replied grimly. "Then she *is* alive?" breathed Daisy, her common curiosity coming back to her, and she felt suddenly important, since she was about to see,—redoubtable privilege,—the legendary figure of the village witch. Speaking over his shoulder, Lovel said, "Olver, go you and tell her I am bringing Daisy up in a moment," and she heard Olver shuffle off, and knew the mysterious suggestion of hearing footsteps mount an unknown stair, and the voice of an unvisualised person speaking in the recesses of an unknown house.

"Must I go up?" she said to Lovel, between fear and desire.

She wondered when she would have the chance of pouring into the ears of one of her confidential friends the account of her first entry into the old woman's room. Not that she could be so very old in years,—not more than sixty or sixty-five, Daisy hazarded,—but her bedridden condition and the squalor of rugs and coverings under



which she croaked and feebly moved lent to her an appearance of almost fabulous age. Dirty and tattered, a heap on the bed in the corner of the dark room, her grey locks straggled about her face, her shaking fingers crooked themselves at Daisy, and her mouth mumbled out unintelligible phrases, in which the words, "A hard son to me, Nicco . . . a hard husband . . . you'll see," alone detached themselves with any significance to the bride. She was herself too much overawed to speak, but stood close to Lovel, who, forbidding though he was, was yet the only familiar landmark in the whole of that house. For his part, he said nothing, not a word to help Daisy out of her fear or her embarrassment; he stood there, and had he not appeared so utterly indifferent she would have said he seemed resigned; he stood there waiting while his mother mumbled out her accusations,—how many years was it since she had had the opportunity of doing so save to Olver?—willing to wait although scorning to justify himself; and it was clear that he cared no more for his wife's opinion than he did for his mother's or anybody else's, but had within himself a reserve of some unknown, unexplained quality, whether pride, or contempt, or self-communion, or all three, but which in any case left him invulnerable and as though he could close his ears at will when he did not choose to hear.

But although even through her fright Daisy was thinking of the succulent story she would

make out of this first glimpse of the old woman, the closing incident was one she would not retail. No, she would not tell any one that when the mumble had finally died away, the mumble and the bursts of laughter, she would not tell any one that as she and Lovel had started to move towards the door the old woman had raised herself up on her extraordinary mountain of sacks and pillows, heaving herself up under all the rugs, and pointing an accusing finger at her daughter-in-law, had cried in an access of malevolent amusement, "Big already, my lass, and on your wedding-day!" She would not tell any one that. She could not, even had she been willing, have described the effect that the old woman's words, uttered in such a tone of discovery and delight, produced upon her. Hitherto she had not thought very much about her condition; it was an inconvenient consequence that often overtook girls of her class when they had omitted to behave with too self-righteous a prudery; and in her own particular case she had been able to turn her "trouble" to excellent account. But with that witchlike cackle a whole future of foreboding rushed up at her, a whole revelation of mischievous malignity. The cackle and the wink—Gorwyn knew her secret; did Lovel's mother know it too? she was credited with sly powers; did Lovel's brother know it? and would they sit for years upon their knowledge until one day it should hatch out, sudden and disastrous? Or had Lovel told them both that the child was

Olver's child? Olver would accept that, surely; he had the memory of the scene in the barn to convince him. What had Lovel told them? she would never dare to ask him, and his inscrutability gave her no hope of discovering by chance.

And then she had been astonished to find how gentle he could be towards her. It was true that he was stern in his injunctions,—no tales of his house to be carried about the village, he said, and poor Daisy saw her one consolation evaporate,—but in his personal dealings with her he was uniformly gentle. Distant always, never relaxing, never easy; but kind with a kindness that wrung the very heart of her love for him. It was as though he pitied her, and was kind to her as he would have been to an animal; although she thought bitterly, there would have been more of love and less of duty in his kindness towards the meanest animal. She could not cajole herself with the idea that anything but duty lay beneath his kindness to her. He was equally gentle, she observed, with his brother Olver, and with his mother, never betraying by any sign his repulsion or his impatience; and Daisy thought sometimes with terror that she herself might be as repulsive to him as the old woman must surely be, but never would she know it, for he would never allow it to appear. And at moments, loving him, she could forget herself sufficiently to be sorry for him in his loneliness and his unrelaxing self-command.

She began to know the full significance of suf-

fering. Before very long she was suffering, in her blind, ignorant way, down to the bone. For discomfort she had bargained; for a hard life of work, since she knew that the business of keeping the house and its three inmates would after her marriage devolve upon her, she had bargained also; for Lovel's severity she had bargained, and with an obscure sense of justice and fair play she had been prepared to accept without complaint these things that she was voluntarily bringing upon herself as the price of securing Lovel for her own, for her husband; but for the torment of his kindness and his proximity she had not bargained. The work she had envisaged with a practical eye; that was within the reach of her capacity, but the emotional problem had altogether eluded her anticipation. She had thought, if she thought at all, that once she had got Lovel safely over that ticklish business of marriage, she would have consummated her supreme ambition. She had not understood that then and then only would her problem truly begin. It had been easy, pitifully easy, to trick Lovel into marriage, easy to play upon the double string of his dejection and his sense of honour; he had allowed himself to be conducted through preliminaries and ceremony alike with the same cold, trance-like indifference; that had been easy for her; but how to dig through to the man beneath that blameless mask? "Nicholas, will you take me to Bath some day, anywhen you've time? I've never seen a bigger town

than Marlborough," and he would answer, kindly, always kindly, but like a man who might well be dead before the day for going to Bath arrived, "I'll take you to Bath, my dear," and she would sidle up to him and say, "That'll be a treat for you too, Nicco?" and he would acquiesce, and at the same time, on some murmured excuse, would put her gently away.

She waited hungrily all day for his return in the evening. His presence exasperated and tortured her, but his absence left her in a perpetual fret, swallowing up what she had anticipated as the principal trial of her days, the sinister companionship of Olver and the old woman. Now that she knew her way about the house,—knew the full squalor of the old woman's room,—had grown accustomed to the croak and the pointing finger,—no longer started at Olver's sudden laughter in the dark passage,—she was not so much oppressed by them; but Lovel, Lovel, was always what she wanted and what she could not have. At first she had restrained herself, not knowing the temper with which she had to deal, but, seeing him so kind, she slackened her restraint, and her affection slopped increasingly over him. He could not be in the house but what she must waddle after him, pawing at his hand or trying to entice him into some friendly phrase. "You like having your house kept by me, don't you, Nicco? You like getting hot meals, don't you, darling?" and often she whined, "I love you, Nicco!"

It was not in her to suffer in silence. When she craved too strongly for him to touch her, she would take his hand and hold it against her full, warm breast. She would sit at his feet in front of the fire, as Olver had been used to do, and lean her head against his knee with sentimental sighs, for she quickly learnt that although he might ignore her he would never repulse her. In the kitchen, when she did this, Olver sat at the centre table squinting into his little mirror at the reflected group of his sister-in-law, his brother, and the red glow of the fire. He was content to sit doing this by the hour, but Daisy could not endure it; she clambered to her feet,—for she was rapidly growing more clumsy in her movements,—and went about the room finding small unnecessary tasks to ease her discomfort. Sometimes she turned noisily on Lovel:

“What are you thinking of, sitting there?”

He was mild in his reply, or else did not reply at all.

“Oh, *I* know, *I* know!” she would cry, in an access of jealousy, but dared say no more.

Only once, when he caught her with his strong hand as she stumbled on the stair, and uttered a word of caution, she turned on him and cried, “You’re mighty careful of another man’s brat.” But it seemed that he had set his will against being goaded into any retort.

The other man’s brat troubled her now, for she could not escape from what seemed to her an absurd desire that it should be Lovel’s. The



Scouring had taken place in May; it was now December, so that she was approaching her seventh month,—but Lovel must not know that: he must think her only in the sixth month, for the incident with Olver in the barn had happened in June; she must always be careful to remember that, or the whole fabrication would be ruinously exposed. She must run the risk of incomplete preparations,—a misled midwife, a probably unavailable doctor should things go wrong. The resented child moved now vigorous within her; she had a full-blown appearance without which she still thought in her naïveté that she might have been attractive to Lovel. In the autumn his bitch had whelped, and she had watched with real anguish his tenderness towards the blind crawling puppies in their wooden box, and later his patient hands teaching them to drink as they crowded round and blew bubbles in the bowl of milk, and later still, when they grew into fluffy balls, cuffing one another and snarling in their small rage, she watched him dangling old cotton-reels for their amusement, or saw him cross the kitchen with the little pack prancing after him, and was shrewd enough to recognise that this was the first thing which had given him pleasure for many months. Now, when he was out at work, she watched them tumbling over each other on the flags of the kitchen, staggering on their still uncertain legs, and the longing grew within her that they should be babies instead, fat babies, hers and Lovel's, and the more she longed for

this the less she welcomed the child that struck so strongly against her flanks. It should be a hearty child, conceived in laughter of healthy parents, a child that would lie content and kick and crow; a little ploughboy; but already she dreaded to see it with Lovel,—would he touch it with his hands that were so light and loving to train and fondle all young things? or would he avert his eyes from it? would it grow up to toddle always after him in preference to any one else, while he endured it between pity and loathing, and would it call him father, poor fraudulent little stranger in a house where it had no right? Only in one degree less did she speculate over Olver's attitude towards it,—Olver who was being passed off as its father,—would he believe himself the father or did he know better? and would he croon in his odd slanting way over the cot, with a grotesque affection? and would he later try to win over the child and fill its head with queer lore? and here a fire of maternal protectiveness and indignation flamed through her, rising suddenly from the depth, as she discovered that she was not willing that her child should come under the influence of Olver.

There were endless possible groupings to be foreseen about the tiny, dangerous, controversial person of the child.

Its burden weighed her down more and more as the seasons deepened towards winter. This child, so light-heartedly conceived on a day in spring, its presence unnoticeable through the

early summer, began to oppress its mother in the saddening autumn, and with winter when the days were dark and short and gloomy, she could no longer forget its existence for a moment. The burden of the child and the burden of the year moved together increasingly towards their culmination. She looked back sadly to the easy days when the child had been light and even her preoccupations had been leavened with hope. Now everything weighed upon her, even the weather which was bleak and dismal: "I declare," she said fretfully to herself, "I'd be no worse off in the Kennet," and she skirted the idea, but lacked the desperation to execute it. She was, however, by now quite sufficiently unhappy. She had nearly lost any hope of gaining Lovel, her days were leaden, she lumbered about the house in slovenly clothes, since at the beginning she had used up all her poor finery by wearing her best every day in the hopes of pleasing Lovel's eye, but now in an access of dejection, she went to the opposite extreme, and took a wilful pleasure in letting him see her at her most slut-tish and ungainly. But nothing, she noticed, caused him to alter his manner towards her whether she presented herself in her muslin, or in an old bodice made of some gray tartan-like material, not joining on to her skirt, so that she appeared to be dressed in some thrown-on coverings from off his mother's bed. But he never varied in his patience and his impersonal kindness; he neither retreated to a greater distance,

nor allowed himself to become more approachable. Every evening he returned to his house to rejoin the company of Olver, his mother, and the cumbersome and plangent woman, but by no word did he betray either his nausea or his weariness. "Oh, yes, he's a good husband," said Daisy bitterly to young Gorwyn, "he doesn't drink, he doesn't hit me, and he gives me all his money. He's a good husband enough."

Young Gorwyn lounged gracefully round the house-door.

"Then you've fallen soft," he observed in his drawling voice, surveying Daisy from head to foot as she stood just within the entrance to the dark passage.

"I've fallen soft," she echoed, full of sarcasm.

This was in October, and in the blue early dusk people were gossiping at their house-doors, up and down the street. Young Gorwyn felt a spice of adventure in philandering thus openly with the newly-wedded wife of the redoubtable Lovel,—advertising to the whole street his disregard of Lovel. Not that there was any glory in passing the time of day with Daisy; everybody knew that Daisy was cheap and easy, giving impudence for impudence, a joke for a joke. But in making free with Lovel's property there was glory, in being so near to Lovel's house; almost inside it, one might say; in dawdling there, treating it as any ordinary house. He thrust his hands into the pockets of his breeches, and lounged, and stared at Daisy. She was a good

sort, and he had got off cheap, were his dominant reflections; and was quite sure,—with a grin,—that she read his thoughts and wholly sympathised with them; would not have been shocked, in fact, had he voiced them and held out his hand, thanking her for the escape she had allowed him. He did not credit her perhaps with very much respect for him, but then he had equally little for her.

“Let’s see our kid now and then,” he said.

“What?” she said sharply.

“Let’s see the kid now and then,” he repeated, so that she wondered whether she had heard him right the first time.

“Oh,—maybe,” she replied, trying to show herself nonchalant about it as he, being a woman who readily took her cue from men.

She remembered the wink in the porch of the church, and that small, all-compromising word, so silyly slipped into his phrase, seemed to her a first cousin of the wink; they had the same family air of innuendo, of confederacy. The impertinence! she thought, in her heart of hearts frightened rather than indignant, and she had a good mind to have the question out with him then and there, but, giving him a preliminary look, she decided to hold her tongue; an admission, once made, could not be recalled, whereas silence committed one to nothing. She was far, however, from trusting young Gorwyn now that she came to examine him more closely; he was strong and sleepy and graceful, lounging against

the door-post, but there was something of the cat in his face with the broad cheek-bones, and the fair-lashed blue eyes so deep-set that when he smiled they almost disappeared into two little slits, and the way his fair hair grew so thick and low on his forehead; and she knew from experience,—all too well,—how caressing were his hands, caressing and heavy, when he reached them out towards a girl. A return of the passing attraction he had had for her came upon her, and she had a moment of queer disloyalty to Lovel, contrasting his slim darkness with the square Saxon strength of Gorwyn, to whom she was really so suitably mated. Their glances crossed; they understood one another too well, and looked away. "I must be getting on," said Gorwyn after a pause which lasted a perceptible moment.

But that was in October, and she had not seen him again for any private conversation, however evasive. Autumn had gone, winter had come, with the violence and completeness to which dwellers on those uplands were accustomed. Snow blocked the roads. Communication with Marlborough was cut off, the inhabitants of King's Avon resigned themselves to rely upon their own store of provisions, the Downs lay around them, white and enormous. They did not resent their isolation, but accepted it, almost yearly, as coming in its turn in the nature of things. It imprisoned them, more than ever self-contained, in their cup within the earth-



work, with their pagan stones, their Christian church, their shops, and their Manor House, where Mr. Warrener was now their only representative of gentry; snugly a homogenous community. Lovel alone saw in the snow something more than a mere barrier against the outside world, a barrier that was almost a defence; he saw the stones standing up black out of a white field, the black trees powdered and spangled; he knew that he could go up on to the Downs without the fear of meeting any stranger riding there for pleasure. He could look from the crest of the White Horse Hill out over the country, without seeing the roads of civilisation, without seeing the White Horse itself, and his shepherd's hut was as rough a shelter as primitive man would have devised. He took a certain pleasure in the discomfort and severity of his winter life. Often he would be the only man to leave the village of a morning, passing out on his way to the uplands while a few isolated figures trudged up the draughty street against the blizzard with sacks thrown round their shoulders, going to their cowsheds or to clear a space for their poultry; but Lovel passed them, leaving them to such domestic occupations, and sought the high lands, where wind and sleet swept across like aerial cavalry, and the driven snow was banked deep in drifts against the scars and scoops of the hillsides. Here, as he stood alone with the spears of the weather driving through him, he had a sense of triumph: he had got the better

of the Downs, he had got the better of his own soul. His physical and mental endurance were alike strong enough to cope with the utmost rigours that Nature and fate were able to devise for his trial. This grim satisfaction, he felt, was the last luxury he permitted himself to indulge. For the rest, he had stripped himself bare of soft superfluities as a man could be; down to bone and sinew he had stripped himself. At times, in his moments of strange, harsh exaltation, when the gale screamed most piteously around him, he wished he might divest himself of his clothing, outward symbol of protection, and stand naked to support the lashings of the wind and the frozen hail; he thought proudly that no harm would come of it to his lean body. But although he never allowed himself to exploit the desires of this fanatical folly, he knew that he had touched the apex of his conquest over himself and his country, and, relaxing, he considered with a grin the superstitious amazement of his fellow-villagers should they, passing below, chance to see upon the skyline the naked figure of Lovel (whom they had always known for a wizard) crucified against elements where horse and man might scarcely hope to live.

He had his reward when the storm ceased, and, again alone upon the heights, he surveyed, as though his will alone had imposed the calm, the thick smooth quilt of snow and the blood-red sun descending towards the beech-clump through the perfect stillness.

But in the direction of Starvecrow he never wandered, where Calladine edged with some rare book closer to the fire, and Clare stood with her face against the panes staring out of the window over the snowy Downs.

Daisy began now to cling to him more and more. Her child was nearly due, but since she alone knew this,—and perhaps young Gorwyn, if he took the trouble to reckon up the dates,—every one believed the birth to be distant yet another month. Daisy was frightened; she dared not tell Lovel that the child might now be born any day; but she dreaded his long absences, for she feared that she might die without making her confession or obtaining his forgiveness. If all went well, she had no intention of confessing; but if she saw her life in any danger she had made up her mind to barter the security of this life against that of the next. Superstitious, she imagined that she would run more danger through bearing this child that she had carried during the months of deception and fraud, than she would through bearing a child honestly conceived and carried. She was mortally afraid of death, and mortally afraid of losing Lovel. She tried to sound him, “You’d be sorry if anything happened to me, Nicco?”

Lovel had heard this a dozen times already.

“Why should anything happen to you?” he replied.

“I shouldn’t have gone with Olver,” she mumbled, twisting the corner of her skirt.

"That's a long time ago,—that's over and done with," he replied patiently and cheerfully, feeling sorry for what he thought was her genuine repentance.

"But this is the result," she said, not consoled.

"Don't distress yourself," he said.

"Supposing I was taken bad," she began again.

"'Tisn't for a month yet," said Lovel.

"One doesn't know always, with such things."

"Will you see the midwife?" he asked, perceiving that she was worried. But the whole subject, and Daisy's very existence, though he spoke with solicitude and bent a kindly gaze on her to discover what were the poor creature's real wishes,—the whole subject to him was utterly remote and meaningless.

"The midwife over to Marlborough by this snow-fall!" she cried disdainfully.

"I'll ride over and get her if you like,—I'll bring her out on a pillion."

"No, no, Lovel," she said, shaking her head, "neither now nor when the child is born,—I'll die without midwife, or doctor, more likely."

"You're determined to see it in its blackest light," said Lovel, but he spoke good-humouredly, without losing his patience.

"Well, it isn't of me or my baby you think, when you sit silent by the hour, is it?" said Daisy, suddenly losing her temper, pulling herself up with the help of the table, and wandering aimlessly around. "'Tisn't your baby, so why

should you think of it? and if I come to die, well, good riddance for you, and you'll be able to think you did your duty by me. But much you care now, when you go out into the snow like the crazed gipsy you are,—to meet Miss Warrener, Mrs. Calladine, for all I know,—much you care that I sit at home and think myself sick over the danger I'll run and the pain I'll suffer, while you maybe won't come near home till it's all over one way or the other."

"When the time gets near I'll stop closer to home."

She wanted to cry out, "You dolt, you block-head, the time is near *now*," but dared only repeat "One doesn't always know . . ." and began to whimper.

"I won't go far afield," said Lovel, soothing her. He was full of pity for all women in her condition, so that none of her words had power to anger him.

A small remorse came over her when he was kind like this, a compunction for having tricked him: would he have been so kind, so long-suffering about the child had he not believed without question in his own brother's guilt? She tried to edge closer to him; "Nicholas, if anything happened to me, you wouldn't think too hardly of me, would you?"

"Nothing's going to happen to you," said Lovel, weary of the discussion, but still patient and kind.

"You won't go far, Nicco, will you?"

"No, if that comforts you."

He was committed now, having given his promise; there would be no more roamings for him; but he was willing to forgo their small solace, negligible in the midst of his desolation, if thereby he might reassure the poor contemptible creature.

"Nicco," she said timidly, with an impulse of honesty, prompted by his gentleness, "'t isn't fair to ask you, hardly . . . 't isn't your child, after all's said and done."

"I'm responsible for my brother," said Lovel, and she turned away from him and wept, overcome.

"You're an upright man, Lovel," she cried through her tears, "too upright for such as me."

He had not understood her full meaning, of course; he had told her again not to distress herself, he had assured her again that he would not go far from home, he had even patted her shoulder, letting her see nothing of the effort it cost him, and he had gone out then, to a house down the street where he had a small carpentering job to finish. Daisy remained alone in the kitchen, alone with the satisfaction of having gained her point that he would abandon his long absences, but still she was not satisfied as she expected; she sat on where he had left her, bluntly probed by conscience, she whose conscience had never troubled her until this contact with Lovel and his standards: what was she doing to Lovel,



she asked herself now? she had got him, but was that all? was that enough for her? to have got him and to know she had caught him by a trick? to see him inert under his dull unhappiness? never to hear him complain, never to catch him at fault, but to see him quiet as though his spirit was ebbing daily from him? Even she, in her blundering insensitiveness, stirred uneasily at the thought of his injuries. "But what was I to be at?" she cried to herself in self-justification; "I wanted him, and all's fair . . ." She moved in her chair and twisted her hands. "Nicco, Nicco," she moaned. "If he knew how I wanted him he'd forgive me," and with this reflection came a deeper stab: it was probably true that he would indeed forgive her,—that she had indeed broken him down to the extent of that saint-like clemency. What would put anger and mettle back into him? what would put life back into him? Clare, nothing but Clare, without whom he was incomplete, only a gentle husk; and for a passing moment her thoughts travelled to Clare, living out her life in some fashion or another by Calladine's side at Starvecrow. What, in her ignorance, had she helped to bring about? She paused and drew back on the brink of things she did not understand, taking refuge again in her own miseries, comfortably familiar by reason of the many times she had pored over them, with no dark corners or frightening perspectives, but all close, small and personal, under the range of

her poor niggling microscope. And she was in the right frame of mind for such brooding, feeling herself oppressed and full of foreboding, as she sat in the kitchen big with the child, and big with the failure of her life, waiting indeed for deliverance from the child, but seeing no solution to the greater oppression, which she might expect to continue until she should grow as spiritless and broken as Lovel and their existence should dwindle to a grey twilight of apathy unenlivened even by anger or revolt. She had rarely felt so dejected; the very stones of the kitchen walls crushed her with their rude size; the child within her, usually so active, so ironically vigorous, was so quiet to-day that she began to wonder whether it were dead; the old woman overhead made no sound; and all round the house lay the thick soft deadening pall of snow that muffled the country from Thames to Severn. She wished that Lovel had not gone out; disheartened though she now was, she still clung to the tormenting comfort of his presence; it was almost a consolation to see him suffering beside her. Since life held neither hope nor joy for either of them, let her in her own pain at least be able to sneer at the sight of his; let them be together in their separation. She grew frightened at the wildness and virulence of her thoughts. They were not so much thoughts, as impulses that floated a little crazily across her mind. She was not well to-day; it was not surprising; it was cruel of Nicholas to leave her alone. She stirred, and looked round,

saw no one, but fancied that eyes watched her. "Olver!" she cried out, although she had seen nothing.

In a pause that followed her cry she breathed heavily, staring round with eyes that dared not flutter into a blink. Her eyeballs became tense and dry, her hands strained at the edge of the table. For all that she knew, her brother-in-law might have been in the room all the time; she was still startled by his soft appearances and vanishings, as by his sudden meaningless laughter, and by the arrows of shrewdness that would dart across his erratic brain. "Olver?" she whispered next, half-expecting him to answer from under her very feet, and little as she desired his company, she thought that any answer would be preferable to the continued silence in the room and to the doubt as to whether Olver was there or not.

She was coming to the conclusion that her instinct had been a mistaken one, since five minutes had certainly elapsed while she stared and peered round the room, and she was about to relax from her strain of looking and listening for Olver, when she heard a faint tap on the window, and, looking round, she saw his face pressed against the window pane from outside. Her fright gave way to petulance; she called out to him to give over his tricks, and at the same time she beckoned imperiously to him to come into the house. Well-accustomed to him by now, she felt relief when he materialised out of the silence.

"How long had you been watching me?" she asked.

"That's my secret," he replied.

She struggled, impatient of the little mysteries he liked to make.

"Anyhow, Nicholas isn't here," she observed, turning away from Olver and tapping her fingers irritably upon the table.

"I don't want Nicholas," said Olver, "I want you."

He came further into the room, while she looked at him in enquiry.

"Oh, you've found an old bird's nest you want to show me," she said disdainfully.

"That's as far as you can think," replied Olver with equal disdain. He came up to her. "Have you ever thought that there's things you've no idea of going on all round you?"

"Why," she said, fright again overtaking her, "that's what I was thinking just now."

"But you didn't like to think too close on it?"

"No, perhaps I didn't. Let me be, Olver; I've troubles enough without you moidering me."

"And are you the only one to have troubles?"

"Let me be, Olver, I tell you."

"No, I won't let you be. I've a grudge against you. I've thought it out."

"I'm not well, Olver; keep your grudge till I've got my baby. Then I'll have it out with you if I must."

"You hadn't any pity on Nicco."

"Oh, that's how the land lies, is it?"

"No use being brazen about it, Daisy. I'm here to speak for Nicco, and nothing you say'll stop me."

"If you don't let me be, I'll tell Nicholas, and he'll be angry with you."

"I'm not afraid of Nicco."

"Oh, yes, you are. We all are. Even me,—and I'm his wife."

"A pretty wife. Nicco can kill me if he likes; I'll speak first. I know better what's good for him than he knows himself. You've broken his heart."

"Not me, Olver, not me only. His heart would have been broken anyhow. And God knows he's breaking mine."

"Who cares about yours? Nicco's worth everything."

"I know that, do you suppose I don't know that? It's making me mad, Olver. Can't you have a little pity on me and leave me to myself?"

"I wouldn't have any pity for you, not if you were dying."

"Well, I shall be dying before very long, if that's any consolation to you."

"You aren't the sort that dies. Nicco'll have you stuck to him for years; he'll leave you before you leave him."

"Don't say that, Olver; he's strong; different, but as strong as me."

"Oh, his body's strong enough, but there's something burns him away inside. Look at his eyes."

"Olver, don't say such terrible things. What do you know? I never can tell how much you know,—you're simple, aren't you? He doesn't complain. He doesn't complain to you, does he?"

"He'll die, but he won't have complained once. And we shall never know. He's good to us both, isn't he?"

"Good,—yes, he's good; but you don't understand, Olver, you needn't rub it into me how good he is or how much he's worth. I know it already, I love him so much it makes me sick and mad. It's almost too much for me, what I have to put up with, what with one thing and another. . . . Now go away, can't you? I've told you, I've admitted it all to you; I can't put it more plainly."

"He's good to you just as he's good to me; he hasn't a ha'pennyworth of feeling for you."

"I know, Olver, I know; can't you leave me alone? I'm not well, I tell you; it isn't the moment to come baiting me."

"There's another woman he wanted . . ."

"You shan't speak of her!" screamed Daisy.

"Oh, yes, I will," said Olver, seizing her by the wrists. "Do you call to mind what you once told me, that you saw them together, and it seemed a week wasn't enough for all they had to say? Where are they now. Three miles apart, yet they haven't seen one another for six months,—from the time the Downs were green to the time the Downs are white. And do you sup-



pose he's left her for a moment in thought, or she left him? Not they. They used to slip together to the Kennet, those two, and they've been suddenly divided. And you whine to me because you're unhappy. You say you're not well. Not well! You! Who cares? You could whelp a litter and be none the worse, and you can stand a bit of unhappiness just as well as you can stand your baby. I've no pity for you. But Nicco,—he'll break,—he'll die inside."

"Don't, Olver, don't; what's the good of torturing me now. What can I do?"

"What can you do? You can clear out, can't you? Go and have your baby in a ditch, somewhere where Nicco can never find you again," he said brutally.

"Where would be the good of that? She's married herself, Miss Warrener is, and I love Nicco, I keep on telling you; I can't give him up," cried Daisy, confused and hunted to the last extremity; and she thought of something she could say to Olver, something which would either silence him or else force him to throw down all his cards upon the table, "Whose fault is it, anyhow, that Nicco had to marry me, to save me from the shame his own brother brought upon me?"

"You think you can trick me like you tricked him," cried Olver, horrible with rage. "Why don't you say the shame Peter Gorwyn brought on you? You might be a little nearer the mark."

"Peter Gorwyn?"

They faced one another, all civilisation gone from them. They struck blindly at one another, keeping nothing back.

"I saw you, oh, I saw you, the day of the Scouring."

"I loved Nicco, I do love him; I had to have him!"

"*You* love him?—you're killing him."

"He couldn't have got Miss Warrener,—not with a brother like you. Do you hear? 'Tisn't me that keeps him from her; it's you, you, you."

"Me?" shouted Olver.

"You, did you never think of that before? It doesn't matter whether my baby is your baby or Peter Gorwyn's baby. It's you that spoil his life for him, you and your mother, you mischievous dolt, and your dirty blood in him. He's tainted, and he knows it. 'Tisn't me. I came long after; I'm just an extra. 'Tis you and your mother destroyed him, from the day he was born."

She clasped her hands suddenly to her side and fell back on to her chair.

"You've done for me," she groaned.

The door opened and Lovel stood upon the threshold. Olver ran to him, touching him all over with his hands, reaching up to pass his hands even over his brother's head.

"Look at her, Nicco; she's tricked you, the brat isn't mine, it's Peter Gorwyn's, and she says 'tis I that kept you from Miss Warrener. Why don't you kill her, Nicco? and I'll go right away

if it's true; I love you better than she does; you shall have Miss Warrener."

"What's all this?" said Lovel. He put Olver's passionate fumbling hands aside, and went over to Daisy. "You're ill," he said in a practical voice; "What is it? has Olver hurt you?"

"You heard what he said," she replied, looking up at him with terrified and pain-racked eyes.

"Never mind about that. Are you ill? Let me help you up."

"She's tricked you, Nicco," cried Olver, fawning round him.

"Hold your tongue, Olver; she's in pain. You poor fool, why didn't you tell me? Heaven knows if I can get to Marlborough through this snow with darkness coming on. Lean on me, I'll take you upstairs. Lean on me; never mind anything else."

Olver was pulling frantically at him.

"Is it true, Nicco? is it me? Oh, my poor Nicco,—first me and then her,—what can I do?—but I'll do something,—I'll find something to do,—oh, my head, my heart."

"The pain, the pain!" cried Daisy.

"Lean on me," said Lovel, putting his arm round her.

"Gorwyn's child!" screamed Olver in a frenzy. He followed them to the foot of the stairs, where he stumbled and fell on the lowermost step, still calling incoherently after Lovel, who was persuading his wife up to her room, saying mean-

while, "Lean on me, Daisy, I won't let you fall, don't be afraid, it'll all be over soon."

The word was quickly passed down the village street that Daisy Lovel's time was come, and that Lovel begged the kindness of some charitable woman to remain near his wife while he rode to Marlborough in search of the midwife. "There's a chance for somebody," said one woman, "to see the inside of that house for herself." "And there's a come-down for Gipsy Lovel," said another, "to have to beg for one of us to go into his place. Where would he be if we all refused?" "Her time come already? and she married,—let me see,—four, five months, is it?" said a third. But in spite of these and other scornful remarks, volunteers were forthcoming, and even those who had lagged most behind, or who had recommended that Lovel be left to suffer now the penalty of his years of un-neighbourliness, watched enviously the departure of Mrs. Blagdon for the house of mystery and evil legend. They saw her received at the door by Lovel, drawn in and swallowed up, as to their imagination Daisy herself had been swallowed up on the day of her wedding.

They continued, however, to observe Lovel's house for some time, glancing at intervals between the lace curtains which decked their own windows, and saw a light spring up in the room they assumed to be Daisy's, and a gigantic shadow passing to and fro upon the blind.

Evening had come, swiftly to be followed by night; the snow had begun to fall again in large flakes; very soon the street was white, unbroken by footmarks, since every soul was within doors. The women idly watching between their curtains saw Lovel emerge from his house, close the door behind him, and pass down the alley between two houses to the shed where he kept his horse. They saw him emerge again, leading the horse; they saw him swing himself into the saddle and ride away, his coat collar turned up high against the snow, tall and spare as he disappeared silently into the thick dusk. The women said, "He's off to Marlborough to find the midwife. Things can't be going," they added with relish, "as well as they should." The men only growled, "He must be crazed to think he can find the road to Marlborough on a night like this; he'll break his own neck and his horse's legs." But the women had a curious faith in Lovel's efficiency.

Few village confinements were honoured with so much interest. The darkness in the street was now intense, heightened by the snow that continued to float down in large, soft flakes; only the little yellow lights in the windows broke it, all on the ground-floor level but for the significant exception of Daisy's window, whose lighted rectangle on the upper storey threw its beams out against the falling snow. All was silent in the Lovels' house; ever Mrs. Blagdon seemed to have fallen into the clandestine habits of her

hosts, for she had not once run out across the street in an interval for a moment's gossip with a neighbour; only the shadow passed upon the blind, enormous and suggestive, to show that any life stirred within the house. The snow fell thicker; the few black holes left by the hoofs of Lovel's horse had been long since blotted out, and Lovel himself had disappeared into the night as completely as though he had no intention of ever coming back. Hours had passed, suppers were finished and cleared away in all the little lighted kitchens, still the good wives were reluctant to move upstairs to bed, while careful to conceal their reluctance from the men. And Mrs. Blagdon, when she finally threw up a window in spite of the steely cold, to call out in an irritable and impatient voice, "Anybody seen anything of Lovel?" was answered by a dozen voices in negation.

"How's things, Mrs. Blagdon?"

"Turned round the wrong way," came the reply laconically.

The street fell back into its silence after the small disturbance. Women who had been through the experience gave a moment's pity to Daisy. Gorwyn, the smith, knocking out his pipe against his hearthstone, reiterated the opinion that Lovel would not be seen again that night. Peter, his son, stirred uneasily. "Is it all up with her, would you think, mother?" But Mrs. Gorwyn was contemptuous. "Lord, no; a



solid girl like Daisy'd stand a deal more than that."

Country news, that most unaccountable traveller, spread even to Starvecrow in its isolation. Mrs. Quince was full of it,—she who towards Clare had kept herself so very prim and respectfully reserved. "You will remember, madam, the girl you saw in the attic bedroom here, Daisy Morland by name?"

"I remember perfectly, Mrs. Quince; what of her?"

"You will remember she was stitching at some baby-linen,—she was married to that good-for-nothing Lovel,—Gipsy Lovel, they call him,—a fortnight later,—a matter of three weeks before you were married yourself, madam."

"Yes, Mrs. Quince?"

"She was brought to bed of a son in the early hours of this morning, madam," said Mrs. Quince importantly.

"Really. I hope she is well?"

"Well enough; these country girls make nothing of it. Lightly born as lightly come by, I always say. Yet at one time it was a question whether they could save the baby." Mrs. Quince added some details. "Yes, madam. Her husband had to ride to Marlborough and brought the doctor out a-pillion, and how he could ha' done it with the night as black as pitch, and the snow falling, and the roads hedge-deep in snow,

is what the folk are all asking themselves. They saw him start, but no one saw him come back, but sure enough when they went to unbar their doors this morning there were the tracks of a horse up the street. A fine boy, they say. It's fortunate he hasn't taken after his Uncle Olver."

"Yes," said Clare.

"It's my opinion, madam, I don't know if it's yours too,—that people like that have no business to get children. 'Tisn't fair, as a matter of conscience, when you don't know what dark blood you may be handing on. Anybody has only got to look at the Lovels to know there's no good in them,—well, they ought to restrain themselves, that's what I say."

Seeing that Clare did not reply, Mrs. Quince resumed after a moment, "There always were things about those Lovels that weren't natural. Now here's another thing: how did he ride from King's Avon to Marlborough and back on a night like last night, if something unholy wasn't in league with him? No other man in the village could have done it, and there's not many that would have tried. No, let the baby go, they'd have said, and the woman too, if need be. And he's always out on those hills; if he had to go after sheep there would be some sense in it, but he just goes straying alone when most men are glad enough to keep their fireside. He's been seen on the top of White Horse Hill, in the middle of a blizzard fit to cut you in half. And I have heard it told, that after he's passed by,

the Grey Wethers have been found uncovered; yes, even though they were at the bottom of the deepest drift there they'll be, sticking up black in the middle of the snow."

"You can't believe everything you're told, Mrs. Quince."

"Well, that's as it may be, madam. All the same, I stick to it that there is something unholy about those Lovels; it's easy to say the younger one is daft, but there's nothing daft about Nicholas,—far from it. So why does he look so dark and queer? and why must he pass on his sly Egyptian blood to an English girl? if he must get children, let him get them on one of his own sort, that's what I say."

Here Calladine came in.

"Secrets?" he asked in his most urbane manner, seeing Mrs. Quince become silent in the midst of garrulity.

"No," said Clare. "Mrs. Quince was telling me that Lovel's wife has had a son, and that Lovel had to go to Marlborough in the middle of the night to fetch the doctor."

"Dear me, that's a daring, uncomfortable thing to do," said Calladine, smiling in a patronising way.

"Yes," said Clare, looking at him. "Not many people would have cared for the job, I think."

Calladine laughed negligently.

"You always had a weakness for your poacher," he replied.

"Would you be wanting me any more, madam?" enquired Mrs. Quince.

"If Lovel's wife is in need of anything I can send her, please let me know, Mrs. Quince."

"Yes, madam. Very good of you, madam."

When the housekeeper had left the room, Calladine said, "I never question your actions, as you know, Clare, but do you think it judicious to encourage these people? The woman was married not very long before ourselves, yet she already gives birth to a baby; the man is well-known as an undesirable in the whole neighbourhood."

Clare went up to him. "Oh, Richard," she cried gaily, "are they worth talking about any longer?" She pushed him down into his arm-chair and knelt at his feet. "What are we going to do to-day, tell me?"

"To do?" repeated Calladine in surprise. "Why, what is there that we could possibly do on a day like this? What a restless spirit it is—always crying out to be up and doing—when I am quite content if I may sit and look into your eyes."

"That's very pretty, Richard, but it doesn't mean much; don't you ever want to be out, moving, riding, anything! anything but sit cooped indoors day after day with books?"

"I confess I haven't much desire to be riding into snow-drifts on this particular morning," said Calladine, glancing at the white-and-leadен prospect out of the window.

"And you wouldn't allow me to do so either, if I had a mind to?"

"Such a wild child!" said Calladine fondly, stroking her hair. "How fortunate that you should have a staid, elderly husband to look after you."

"How do you think I looked after myself for nineteen years, then, Richard?"

"Heaven knows," said Calladine in mock dismay; banter with Clare was a form of conversation he particularly enjoyed. The morning promised to pass agreeably; there was nothing he liked better than for Clare to kneel at his feet, as she was doing now, sitting back on her heels, while he looked at her fresh youthfulness with that fond and tender glance of his, and rallied her gently, or caressed her with the courtly phrases she had heard from him alone among men. "How *did* you look after yourself?" he repeated. "You always escaped from old Martha Sparrow, and even the poacher cannot always have been at hand for a ready rescue, and in any case he is scarcely my idea of a knight-errant."

"No," said Clare, "he hasn't such pretty manners as you, Richard."

"Now you're laughing at me,—are you, or aren't you? I never know," and he caught her to him and began flecking her face and hair with quick kisses, but desisted to say more seriously, "You're so exquisitely a woman, Clare, so deliciously a child; I realised that you were both

from the day you first came to visit me here."

The phrase had a vague echo of familiarity for Clare; "so exquisitely a woman"; she felt sure that she had heard him say that, or something very like it, before; and she thought with the hardness that was becoming habitual to her where he was concerned, that from no woman would he demand anything further.

"What a toy I am to you, Richard," she said idly; "what a toy you like to make of me."

"The most exquisite toy that ever came into the life of a sad and lonely man," he said, with a return to his old manner, and he took her hand and began to play with the bangle on her wrist. He handled her much as he would handle his terra-cotta statuettes, and for a while she endured it, but presently sprang away and went to stand at the window where she might look out upon the prospect of shining snow.

"Always looking out, Clare? what liberty do you see out there? you think I ought to let you go, little caged bird, but you would soon perish,—your pretty limbs wouldn't stand the cold,—better stay happily where you are, believe me,—don't fret,—come back to me,—let me whisper how precious you are,—come back to our lovely idleness."

"But I don't like idleness, Richard; no use pretending I do; you should not have married some one so restless as I." His hands were upon her shoulders; she wanted to shake them off.



"Did the poacher . . ." began Calladine.

"Ah, leave Lovel alone," she cried; "what impels you to speak of him this morning? Leave him alone, with his wife and his baby; they can very well look after themselves without any interest from us."

"But, Clare, Mrs. Quince was speaking of them; it's only natural that my thoughts should continue to run in that direction; and even you yourself . . ."

"You're fascinated by the subject of Lovel," she said, whirling round on him, "now, aren't you? own to it. You always bring him in: the Downs, the circus, and now his baby,—everything's an excuse for bringing in Lovel. And why? Is it because he took me out of the circus-tent that night? is it because I rode with him? why not speak out what's at the back of your mind?"

"But, Clare, Clare! why so fierce and challenging suddenly? there's nothing at the back of my mind. ("There is," she thought, "and you too great a coward to face it out.") "Come now, don't let us quarrel and we won't speak of Lovel if it offends you,—will that satisfy you?"

"It's of no importance whether we speak of a man in the village or not," she said, turning away and hunching her shoulders.

They went back to sit by the fire, a bulk of hostility unspoken between them. Calladine felt peevish; his indolent, graceful, vaguely amorous morning had been spoilt; and spoilt by what?

by the presence of Lovel. "You've never yet shaken off that lean rogue," he broke out once, sudden and querulous after a spell of silence. They both sat staring into the fire, separate as they could be. They had not previously spoken of Lovel, not directly, not insistently; only to range round him with that nagging, niggling hesitation that seemed to pull at Calladine. But now his presence blocked every other road of conversation; he got in the way, he was near, he could not be got rid of. Almost, he was in the room.

Calladine looked at Clare; fair and slight, delicate even, but so unafraid. A touch, and she was instantly up and all-daring. She kindled at a spark. What was it that she and Lovel had in common? the same apparent frailty of body, the same flame of spirit,—Calladine had all the lyricism to clothe his perceptions with words. He had apprehended Lovel; on the rare occasion when he had seen him, he had apprehended him fully, to his own disquietude. And he apprehended Clare and their resemblance, with pain and resentment. They were two fine and vulnerable things, he thought; vulnerable and brave. But he thought it with only half of his brain, the lyrical, romantic half; with the other half he was peevish and irritated.

If only they were not so silent; Clare had never faltered or complained. Only she had wanted to go out; she had looked out of the window with a kind of homesickness. He was

always catching her eyes at their straying, and being made aware how far removed she was from himself. But this, again, had been with half of his brain; with the other half he had known that she was his wife and that he had got her under his roof. And he had not allowed his lyrical self to call her a prisoner.

What if she were to escape? He would be without persuasion or authority.

"You stay with me out of apathy," he cried. "If once your fancy changed, you would be gone."

Clare, who had not been thinking of him, turned a mild glance of slight attention on him. He was glaring at her, frightened and angry.

"Yes," he continued, "I don't hold you; you're kind to me, and you indulge my game of pretence. But you're not really here. You're indulgent to me as if I were a child,—'yes, dear, very nice,' between your own, grown-up preoccupations. But you ought to remember that I am your husband," he said.

"When have I forgotten it?"

He sulked. It was true she had not forgotten it. He had no reproaches against her; she had been patient, gentle.

"I don't hold you," he grumbled.

It was a long time since she had seen him like this; usually he was assertive and complacent. How slight a thing it took to disturb him! His complacency was only a façade, a painted hoarding propped up by struts,—theatrical, like every-

thing else about him. But she really bothered very little with him, now that she had found him out.

"Oh, yes, Richard," she said, to pacify him and to be done with the argument.

"But I say no," he cried, hitting his fist on the arm of his chair. "You're for ever looking out of the window, and sometimes when I speak to you, you answer beside the point. I married you to get a wife, not a woman languishing like a captive in my house."

She laughed at that, quite amusedly, and he felt he had been foolish. Still he would not abandon his point.

"That fellow would only have to beckon . . ." he grumbled.

"Lovel again?" asked Clare.

"You enjoy saying his name."

"I do not," said Clare quietly.

"No," he said, staring at her, "perhaps you do not."

Perhaps she did not. Perhaps the very name was pain to her. But he must go wrangling on at her.

"Lovel wouldn't keep you indoors, perhaps you think.—He would let you out into the snow,—take you out into it himself perhaps."

She only looked at him. He went on, more judicial now; deliberate, less blatantly bad-tempered.

"Yet, after all, I don't know why you hold such a good opinion of this fellow Lovel. He

sticks to no trade,—he gets a country girl into trouble and has to marry her,—not a very creditable record, it seems to me.” He was leaning back in his chair, with his finger-tips together. “And, judging by his stock, he has no right to beget sons,—better if he did not associate with women at all,—such people should be allowed to die out.”

“So Mrs. Quince was saying. Perhaps he feels the same himself,” said Clare in a contained voice.

“It looks like it! a child born after four months of marriage. I am bound to say, my dear, your suggestion isn’t very convincing. But there, what should you know of the lusts of these country young men? Animals, merely. Forgive me if I seem self-righteous. I feel strongly,—very strongly.” He leaned forward and patted her. “You can understand that I don’t like to think of my Clare contaminated by such company.”

“You mean Lovel?”

“Most certainly I mean Lovel.—Why do you look at me so darkly, Clare?”

“Did I look at you darkly? I didn’t mean to. My thoughts were far away.”

“And where . . .”

“Ah, Richard, mayn’t I have my thoughts to myself?”

“By all means, Clare. I hope, my dear, that no one has ever accused me of being a tyrant. Of course your thoughts are your own.—But

you don't resent, do you, the things I have been saying of Lovel?"

"I am only tired of the whole subject."

"Yes,—of course,—naturally,—I quite understand that. Mrs. Quince is an old gossip. I must tell her that it really doesn't interest you to be informed every time a woman in the village has a baby. It doesn't does it?"

"No, of course not,—but don't say anything to Mrs. Quince, I beg you."

"But I can't have my wife bothered by my old gossip of a housekeeper. I daresay she meant it well, thinking you were interested in Lovel."

"Richard, please,—let us leave Lovel now,—I shall begin to scream if I hear his name mentioned again, I warn you."

"Clare. You try to joke, but the idea of saying that wouldn't come into your head if there were not some truth in it."

"Well, I told you I was tired of the subject."

"You are talking now like an irritable woman."

"Am I? But I *am* a woman, and not a man, and therefore I daresay as irritable as all other women."

"You mean that men can be every whit as irritable,—myself, for example."

"Now you are putting words into my mouth that I never said. Is it a guilty conscience, Richard?"



"You persist in joking when I want you to be serious!"

"Oh, Richard, what a childish conversation. Instead of sitting here and talking, let us . . ."

"Well, what? Let us what?"

"Nothing, I've thought better of it."

"Let us go out, you were going to say. Always the same folly! Have you any idea of the depth of the snow? Out, indeed!"

"I never said it."

"No, but you thought it.—Ah, if I say that, you will ask again if you mayn't have your thoughts to yourself. There are moments when I don't know how to deal with you, Clare." He knew his own injustice, but his querulous jealousy pricked him on. "Any other woman would be content to sit by her own fireside this bitter day with the man she had married so short a time ago."

"Four months,—getting on for half a year."

"I see,—you have found the time long. If you entered a little more into my interests, instead of having your own thoughts to yourself so much, my dear, perhaps you would find it pass quicker, and it would be more companionable."

Clare thought that he looked at her almost with hatred. She was herself too indifferent to be interested either one way or the other.

"I shall be glad when this accursed snow is melted and gone," he added, "and you will perhaps be a little less restless."

At that moment Mrs. Quince came in, looking perturbed.

"There is Olver Lovel downstairs, madam, asking to see you,—I didn't know what to say,—he seems so bent upon it,—but he looks like a scarecrow, that he does, with his coat torn and his hat stove in, and bits of straw all over him as though he had spent the night sleeping in a barn."

Clare rose.

"Where is he, Mrs. Quince?"

Calladine started forward with a detaining hand.

"No, Clare, you can't see this man,—let me speak to him first,—at least it's not right, not safe, for you to see him."

"And he says he must speak to Mrs. Calladine alone, sir," Mrs. Quince put in.

"Of course I shall see him," said Clare.

Calladine grew agitated. "Mrs. Quince, you need not wait; please leave the room. Now, Clare, understand: it is against my wishes that you see this man. Let me go down and find out what he wants, and then if I find that he is quiet and reasonable I will allow you to interview him in my presence. He has probably come to beg, in which case I can give him a few shillings as well as you can, and send him away."

Clare faced him. "Please let me pass, Richard; I am sorry to do anything against your wishes, but I intend to speak to Olver,—and alone."

"Let me make myself quite clear: it is not only against my wishes, but, since my wishes fail to touch you, also against my orders."

"I am sorry, Richard, but I mean what I said."

He blustered; she remained quiet; in their first encounter he was no match for her.

"You disobey me deliberately, then?"

"This is a case in which I must use my own judgment."

"You will not expect me to receive you back into my favour afterwards."

She smiled a little.

"Really, Richard, I am afraid I must take the risk of that."

"Go, then," he said, stepping dramatically aside, "go, in direct defiance." Still he did not quite expect her to flout his authority, and remained amazed when she passed him and went swiftly out of the room.

Left to himself, he made a movement to follow her, but drew back. Let her go, to her Lovels and her secret life: he had never really held her. Let her go, to the summons which had come, and to which she had so instantly responded. He himself, from the moment Olver Lovel's name had been pronounced, had dwindled to nullity; he had ceased, on the spot, to exist for her. All these months, she had lived with him, a stranger, away from her kind. And he recalled Mrs. Quince's description of Olver,—"he looks like a scarecrow, that he does,"—

this emissary from Nicholas Lovel to his, Calladine's wife.

Calladine strode up and down the room. She was downstairs now with Olver; what was he saying to her? What was in the future, haunted by the presence of Lovel as the past had never been? How should they ever get rid of Lovel now, standing between them? That uncomfortable presence of Lovel in the past, at which Calladine had pecked and nagged, was nothing to his dominion over the future. Surely he had been mad not to take Clare's acquaintance with the poacher as a matter of course? mad to harass her as he had harassed her that morning? By his own folly he had created the spectre, the giant, of the situation. He strode up and down, hitting fist against palm in his vexation. Then he grew afraid; what if the poacher should not restrict his poaching to game alone? What if he should entice Clare by the occult powers with which the countryside credited him? Occult powers, or human powers, it was all one. Calladine felt his helplessness; he was weak, wordy, he could be set aside. They would set him aside, those two.

He was an ill-used man. Self-pity nearly brought tears to his eyes. Life used him ill: first the woman who had fooled him, now Clare. Clare's kindness to him had been a dalliance, while she had nothing better to do; it had evaporated at the mention of a name. He hated her, he hated Lovel, he hated the Downs and the

snow. Glittering and cold, without compromise; he did not understand the Downs and the winter, but Clare and Lovel understood them. What was Olver saying to Clare? Calladine felt his life finished; and through his perfectly genuine anguish he did not fail to perceive the romantic value of his situation. He fell into a chair, and remained there with his legs extended as he gazed despondently on the floor before him.

Clare would tell him nothing. He foresaw that, and his foresight was justified. She came back, immeasurably far removed from him. He wanted to ignore her return, to remain stiff with dignity, but it was not long before his curoisity weakened him. "Well, you are not very communicative. I see that you have no desire to make amends for the distress you have caused me. Was the poacher's message, then, too sacred,—too personal,—to be imparted to me?"

Clare's eyes, when she turned them on him, were narrowed with pain.

"Richard, must you ask me questions now? I have come back to you; I ask you only to leave me to myself."

But that was precisely what he could not do.

"You ask a good deal, don't you, in asking that? I see you white and shaken, yet I am not to know the cause. You ask a good deal of my forbearance, indeed. I am not to know what messages another man sends you. I am not to know what is going on, nearly under my nose, but kept away from me. I am to be defied by

my wife, and then kept in ignorance by her. This is the state of affairs we have come to in one short morning! What has happened to us? it bewilders me . . . I insist upon knowing,—I *will* know,—has that half-wit come to you with a message from his brother?"

"No," said Clare.

"How you have to force even that one monosyllable from your lips! What, he came on his own initiative? Clare, you are not speaking the truth.—Yes, I am sure you are; I beg your pardon. You distract me by your coldness. Clare, forgive me, I scarcely knew what I was saying."

"Don't touch me," said Clare, recoiling, "for pity's sake don't touch me now."

"I am a very unhappy man," said Calladine, falling again into his chair and taking his head between his hands. "I am indeed an unhappy man,—what am I to do with my life?"

He remained for some time with his head sunk between his hands, then, glancing up to see what effect his attitude might have had upon Clare, he found her gazing out of the window.

"I see,—you forget my very presence," he said reproachfully, and his sense of injury was doubled. But because his distress was genuine, although he could not refrain from rhetoric, he followed her across the room in a tormented way, and tried to see into her face. "Clare, speak to me; I am not angry, only unhappy. There is



something now in your mind which I do not share; you live in a half-hour which is secret from me.—Or have you always,” he cried suddenly, “lived in hours I knew nothing of?”

Mrs. Quince peeped in through the door.

“Ah, that’s good,” she said in a relieved tone; “I wasn’t easy so long as I thought Mrs. Calladine was with that scamp,” and she retired.

“Even the servants, you see, Clare, are concerned for you.”

“Mrs. Quince, far from being concerned,” Clare said, returning briefly to a consciousness of Calladine and of the house that held her, “is full of delight.”

“Clare, these bitter words from you! you are changed indeed, or am I seeing you as you are for the first time? I begin to look back at these four months as at a long delusion; I am utterly bewildered. You are withdrawn to an unbelievable distance from me; I feel it, yet I cannot say what has taken place. This morning, we were close to one another; we were, as it seemed, enclosed by our little room, leisured, snug, sheltered; now, I am striving to reach you, and am held off.” His words beat without meaning against Clare’s isolation; she could not emerge at all from the tumult of the terrible scene she had endured from Olver. She looked, indeed, at Calladine, intently, as though she were trying to bring herself back to the importance of his world, but her eyes were empty.

The day dragged away; Calladine continued to clamour fitfully. He could not leave her alone, and, though she clearly suffered, he, per-verse, must torment her. By adding to her pain, he added to his own, but could not desist. She answered him very little; a negative, an affirmative now and then, was all he could get from her; for her part, all that she wished was that his voice might cease, so that she might have a lull, a silence, alone with her own mind. Yet it seemed to her that she had, indeed, a silence at the core of her being, still and inviolate against his ineffectual clamour, like the stillness in the heart of a cyclone, where birds poise and sing. At this core, this kernel, this patch of peace, she dwelt apart; Lovel was there, and so was Olver, Olver with the urgent hands and fanatical eyes, passing from Lovel to her and from her to Lovel, almost crushing them up against one another by the force of his urgency. Olver's determination was like a menace, becoming almost malevolent by virtue of its very violence. He overwhelmed, he terrified her; she had nothing but weak refusal; she had tried to push him away with hands that had no strength in them. She had covered her eyes, but he had forced away her hands; she had shut her ears, but he had screamed past her defences. It was easy to remain deaf to Calladine's whining; it had been impossible to shut out the ferocity of Olver's attack. And yet, in spite of the din, she was

aware of that core of silence, in which she and Lovel were, with Olver rushing between.

She and Calladine, Lovel and Daisy, there they were, the four of them, all separate; and Olver, like a firebrand, a trail of fire, working between them. They might have had some control, the four, but for this crazy creature, obsessed by the one idea, not to be reasoned with. He was the incalculable element; he made the others helpless, taking their intentions out of their hands and throwing them away.

The danger of Olver,—what if he should see Calladine? What if he should irrupt into the room and shout irreparable words before she had time to stop him? The danger of Olver,—what had he said to Lovel? what to Lovel's wife? But Calladine and Lovel's wife alike remained insignificant; she and Lovel were the two full of meaning, shut up with the wild, charging Olver in their core of silence.

Vaguely somewhere, she was sorry for Calladine, but he was insignificant; she could not pause to consider him; where she and Lovel came together, he faded into that poor wisp drained of blood, that he had dwindled to on the evening of the circus fire, when she and Lovel had stood together on the embankment. They shed him; he slipped off, and only his noise reached them intermittently, scarcely troublesome.

Daisy herself was less unreal than Calladine; Daisy knew suffering too, Clare supposed; in a

clumsy, common way she knew it; blundering, but human; yes, she could be sorry for the other woman.

But they must be sacrificed, the two, Calladine and Daisy, if matters came to a head; sacrificed to the blazing reality of herself and Lovel.

Would Olver come again? Would he leave her alone now? Would he give her a chance to forget the words he had spoken? some of them remained, rang in her head, brassy, like beaten gongs; fell on her like big sparks from an anvil, burning. It had been a strange experience, to hear Olver voice the passion that had upreared itself, always mute, in Lovel.

Olver came again. He came like an avenging angel, inspired, the crazed creature, by the urgency of his message. Like a reproachful angel he came to rebuke her, grotesquely disguised in his scarecrow travesty; the beauty of his selflessness shone through the ramshackle of his appearance. She scarcely knew whether to find him pathetic or alarming; she wanted to pity, she could only be disturbed; he disturbed her to the darkest places of her soul. The fixity of his idea, the strength of his purpose, his devotion, his anger, raised his simplicity to the plane of nobleness. She could not answer him; she was abashed before him.

She was afraid of him, his image pursued her, his upraised hand denouncing her, his eyes and tongue pouring scorn upon her. At moments he seemed like fate itself, like a thing she could

not escape from. She never knew at what hour of the day he would come, so all day, sometimes for two or three days on end, she waited, dreading and longing for his coming. She could have refused to see him, but had not the strength; but when she must crush Calladine's protests, then she had strength in plenty.

The snow lay deeper than ever, after another heavy fall, upon the Downs, but although still a prisoner her restlessness had left her: the life she had wanted came now to her from without. Olver brought that life; he brought tumult, anguish, but it was life that he brought, besieging her. And although he was not Lovel's envoy, still it was straight from Lovel that he came. His eyes, as they flamed on Clare, an hour earlier had been filled with Lovel; she could fancy Lovel's image still lingering in them. And after he had left her, it was to Lovel's presence that he would return; he would hear Lovel's voice and see Lovel's hands, that so haunted her. Once she broke her silence to ask about Lovel, "What does he do, these days of snow? does he get out? stay at home?" and Olver answered, "To-day he has been twisting new snares, and last night he brought home a lamb that still lies by our fire."

She knew that an end must come; beleaguered, she knew that. She had pushed life away, but it had followed her, even into her retreat. It was useless; Calladine was not life; his need of her had not been life. He was a shadow, a man

of pretence, sufficient to himself, with his own pretences for company. It was only the true solitaires, the really lonely people, like Lovel, who had absolute need of their chosen loves. The strong, clamping loves, that fastened on to one another, to lose their hold only when they lost their hold on life; the unalterable, ordained loves. She could not justify the argument; her selfishness towards Calladine remained unjustified. But she knew that that would not weigh with her; she and Lovel would reach one another when the day came, even through a stone wall.

Still she could not justify it. She tried to, perfunctorily. She sat frowning, and saying the words over to herself. Selfishness, duty. They remained mere words; she could not feel them in her blood, as she felt her need for Lovel and Lovel's need for her; they were words pitted against instinct. Was it love, that need? Was it no more than that ordinary miracle, love? She thought that it was more. They had the Downs as a bond between them; the Downs, and all nature, of which Lovel seemed the spirit, the incarnation. He was the darkness of the Downs, their threat, their solitude, their intractability; she was their light, their windiness, their sunlit flanks, their springiness of turf. United, they formed a whole. There was an essential significance in Lovel, as there was an essential insignificance in Calladine.

Olver seemed to know these things; he had an untutored insight. Calladine seemed to know



them too, but that was less surprising; with his subtle, lyrical mind he might well be expected to apprehend, and apprehending, to drape in wordiness; to give a name; to illuminate blind impulse by giving a name. Poor Calladine; she watched him, detached, as he rambled from discovery to definition, tormenting himself by the beauty of his own phrasing. At moments he viewed them, herself and Lovel, as a spectator, losing himself in the romanticism he wove around them; recalled to the fact that it was his own wife of whom he spoke, he relapsed into the gloom and terror of his pain. For he lived in terror, impotent terror. And Clare watched him, living herself in her hours with Olver and in her consciousness of Lovel.

There was the little round mirror she had given to Olver. He always brought it with him; he told her, chuckling, and tapping its bright surface with his finger, that he could see her in it even when she was not present. She did not believe this, but still she half believed it. "Look into it now," he said, thrusting it under her eyes, "and you will see Nicholas." She shrank back, afraid; he could not persuade her to look into it, he could not even deride her into looking into it. "You don't believe me, yet you won't look," he said, "but if you don't believe me, why then won't you look?" He was for ever daring her to look into it, to find the image of Nicholas. She would not; she did not believe in the magical

properties of the mirror, yet nothing would induce her to glance into its queer convexity. "I watched the circus in this, the night Nicholas took you out of the tent," he said, and she wondered whether he knew how bound to Lovel she had felt herself that night; "I watched Nicholas' wedding in this; I looked in this at him and Daisy sitting in the kitchen. Look into it now," he said, offering it to her again: "maybe you'll see Daisy nursing her baby; maybe you'll see Nicholas twisting snares; maybe you'll see him riding up on White Horse Hill, alone, in the snow."

"Do you remember what I told you once?" he said to her another time, "that Nicholas could bring you out to him, even at midnight, if he gave his mind to it?"

She wondered how long this strange period would last; she was not even impatient; the core of peace and silence within her lay so certain, so quiet, that she dwelt already as it were serene in the fulfilment of herself and Lovel.

Calladine came to her door to find it locked against him. He shook the handle. "Clare! it is I." A wild winter night; the wind blew along the passage, lifting the loose matting on the floor, the gas-jet on the stair flickered and below the well of the staircase was dark. "Clare!" said Calladine again, shaking the handle.

Her voice within answered him, faint, shut away.

"Yes, I am here; I am in bed."

She was there! the house contained her at least; she had not fled.

"Let me come in, Clare."

A long pause, and then her voice again.

"I cannot, Richard."

"You have locked me out?"

"I am sorry, Richard; I can't let you in."

He stood irresolute. Then he started shaking the door, frightened by its wooden resistance. Still she did not come to open, she remained hard to him, did not even pray him to desist. He ceased his useless shaking and began to plead with her, tears in his voice, humiliating himself. She made no answer. He went away, down into the sitting-room, where the embers of the fire still gleamed red between the bars. "I gave her everything," he whispered, looking round upon the comfort of the room. Upstairs, she lay in her bed, soft and sweet and indifferent as he had always known her,—lost to him. He went over to the window and looked out; the masses of the clouds flew before the wind, so that the stars seen between the rifts seemed to be rushing across heaven. Starvecrow lay beneath them, small and lonely. A hatred of the place overcame him. "I shall take her away," he muttered; "we will go to London." And he saw her a fleeting figure, hurrying down straight narrow London streets, her footsteps that were used to the short turf ringing forlornly along the pavement. He pitied her in the midst of his anger and frustration: surely in London she would

droop and pine. But she must be the one to suffer now; it was her turn; he had suffered enough. He could not run the risk of leaving her among these open hills, in league with the Lovels,—even now that crazy boy, that wild scarecrow figure, might be frisking beneath the windows. His wife, linked with those dark people,—so linked, that she was and always had been a stranger to him. Misery drove him to superstition: there was a kinship between the Lovels and the country, witchcraft and legend, the crazy boy, the sarsen stones, the ancient sacrifices, Lovel the vagabond poacher, the wayward shepherd, his immunity from cold or fatigue,—all these things ran together in Calladine's unhappy head.

And Clare, what place had she among them? she was the country in its loveliness, the running brooks, the soaring birds, the sheep-bells, the dew, the distance, the manifold music.

He would take her away. Next day, he told her so, challenging her refusal. And although she neither refused, nor, indeed, made any answer, he insisted on the point, growing noisy in his insistence. "We shall leave this place, do you hear? We shall go, we shall take the railroad to London." But London must be an empty sound to her, he thought, whose world was the Downs. "The city of London," he emphasised, seeing the streets, the squares, the endless houses,—a maze of streets, in which she would lose herself, seeking in vain the way out.

He looked at her with hatred; there, in London, where he would feel himself at home, he would at last get the better of her, be revenged upon her for all the pain she had made him endure; there, she would be the bewildered stranger, and not he; perhaps she would even cling to him for reassurance, and he would mock at her in her distress, and spurn her, over and over again, until she crept broken at his heels.

Then, seeing her so pale and fragile, he was remorseful, and fell on his knees beside her, crying, "Forgive me, Clare."

She sat with him after dinner in their room. He was not restive, that evening; his panics overtook him only periodically; sometimes he appeared to regain all his old confidence. Olver had not troubled Starvecrow for several day, and Calladine readily forgot. He was standing now by his bookcase, lovingly shifting the volumes; his touch slipped like velvet over the frail old leather; delicately he fluttered over the pages. Clare could even find it in her heart to envy him, life to her came so rough and violent, to him so veiled and mellowed, always, so to speak, at second-hand. He murmured to himself over his books, or was it to her that he addressed his murmurings? how real was her presence to him? was she more real than those fugitive terra cotta nymphs of his? was she perhaps less real? as lovely, but more troublesome? a nymph that would not stay there quiet on her stand, but whose draperies were blown by the wild wind

from outside, and whose feet stirred mutinous towards escape? Still he murmured over his books, without that uneasy glance which meant that he was afraid of losing her; he had forgotten, for the moment; it was providential how easily he forgot, his excitability easily roused, and almost as easily abated.

But as for her, an oppression was on her, an exaltation. She rose. "Richard, I am going to the door to look at the night; don't come; it's cold outside."

He was startled, but he had known her do this before, and he had no desire to leave his books or the warmth of the room. "Take a coat," he said. She went up to him and kissed him lightly. He patted her shoulder with affection, and watched her cross the room to the door. "Graceful . . . graceful," he murmured to himself in appreciation, turning again to his shelves.

Clare passed downstairs to the hall. She moved as though her feet did not touch earth. With a fur cloak thrown round her, she opened the door and stepped out into the night, closing the door again behind her. The Downs were there, white in the starlight. Overhead, in a black sky, blazed the constellations, not yet sunk from the splendour of winter: Orion, low in the west, the splendid Plough, and Sirius, single and more brilliant than the rest. Clare passed down the dark path, swept clear of snow, to the little gate; at the gate the dark shape of a man came forward to meet her; it was Lovel.



"I knew you would be here," she said without surprise.

"I have not been before," he answered.

"No," she replied, "I knew that."

There was a little silence.

"Will you come with me now?" he said.

"What, out on the Downs?" she asked, trying to see his face through the darkness.

"Well, we belong there, don't we?" he said patiently.

"Then what has kept us apart, I wonder?" she said. She wondered genuinely; their union seemed so large and simple. "Yes, I will come," she added then.

"I have tried not to come to you, Clare," said Lovel. "The child is not mine, you know," he went on.

"I know; Olver told me. But what does it matter? Shall we go?"

He followed her through the gate, and they took the track up on to the Downs.

Three days later Calladine rode into King's Avon, turning in at the Manor House gates at the slow walk which had been his pace for the whole three miles of his journey. He rode slackly and without interest, letting his horse stumble; even the instinctive check on the reins seemed to have deserted him. He gave his horse to William Baskett, who ran out from the stables, and, laying his gloves and crop on the bench in the hall, trod wearily into Mr. War-

rener's presence. The old man was surprised and delighted to see him. "My dear Calladine,—my dear Richard, fancy your riding over in this snowy weather,—why, I thought you scarcely stirred out of doors. And what brings you?" He peered closer. "Dear me, there's surely nothing the matter?"

"Clare has left me," said Calladine. The phrase had been in his head for three days now. It was a relief to him to pronounce it at last aloud. "She has gone away with young Lovel."

"But I don't understand," said Mr. Warrener. "Left you? gone away with young Lovel? The shepherd fellow? But why? where have they gone to? what for?"

Calladine raised his hands and let them fall again with a gesture of hopelessness,—the hopelessness of explaining to Mr. Warrener. Yet in a way he relished lacerating himself with the explanation.

"Clare and the shepherd fellow," he said, "are lovers. Yes, it is as I tell you. They have been lovers for many months, perhaps for many years. They were in the habit of meeting on the Downs,—I don't know how often,—frequently,—perhaps every day. I can't tell. Since Clare has been married to me they had not, so far as I know, met at all. She has only seen Lovel's brother,—the simpleton. He has come over to Starvecrow to see her. I don't know what he has said to her. I can only suppose that he

engineered their meeting. All I can tell you is that three evenings ago she went out, as she said, to look at the night, and has not since returned."

"Three evenings ago!" exclaimed Warrener. "But I knew nothing of all this."

"No," said Calladine wearily, "I gave strict orders that you were not to be told. I thought she would come back, you see. But as she has not come back, I cannot keep it a secret from you any longer. We must take some action, I suppose, if you think it necessary. Or shall we leave them to themselves. If any one is capable of looking after her, Lovel is the man. And he knows the Downs,—they both know the Downs,—surely the Downs wouldn't hurt them?"

Mr. Warrener took no notice of this pitiable cry wrung suddenly out of his anxiety.

"Of course we must search for them," he said, frightened and bewildered and angry. "But,—really this is a most extraordinary story,—how do you *know* she has gone with young Lovel? Clare!" he said, indignant, "whom I trusted to wander about at will,—to deceive me in this fashion!—but she never came to any harm, whilst she was under my care,—no, not until *you* were responsible for her. Upon my word, sir, you've fulfilled your charge very badly,—what excuse have you to give to me?"

"You let her grow up into a wild thing,—the blame's with you as much as with me,—and

as to responsibility, she's my wife even if she *is* your daughter."

"Well, well," said Mr. Warrener, relapsing into his customary mildness, "it won't help matters if you and I start wrangling. But tell me now, what makes you so certain she has gone with this . . . his name positively sticks in my throat,—this shepherd fellow?"

"What makes me so certain? What do you suppose I have been doing these three days?" said Calladine querulously. "What do you suppose my state of mind has been? I knew Clare was safe, in one sense, I know she was with Lovel. Yes. His wife came to Starve-crow after him; she had guessed where he was going. Oh, a pretty interview I had with her—I have Clare to thank for that. She came crying to the door, and Mrs. Quince let her in, so Mrs. Quince, at least, guesses the whole story. She brought the woman up to my room, and left her alone with me, and I saw her smirk as she went out of the door. A pretty business. . . . She cried to me, this woman; she sat in Clare's chair and cried. She owned up—a long tale—how she had got Lovel to marry her and how her child was neither his child nor his brother's; I really don't know what else—a long tale. She talked very extravagantly—said she was dying for love of him—and how he had never touched her,—a lot of nauseous detail. She kept on saying that he was decent,—decent, decent to her,—that kept on coming back,—and that she was

sorry now,—she was being punished for what she had done. He was civil to her always, she said, but as cold as winter, and now he had gone. There was nothing left for her now, she said, but to stay looking after his people,—his old mother and his mad brother,—that was her idea of making amends. We went out together and looked all over the Downs for Clare and Lovel; she sobbed and cried all the time. She wanted me to raise a hue and cry, to put the police on their trail, but of course I would not do that. ‘If they want to go,’ I said, ‘let them go with as little noise as possible.’ But I looked for them myself, and if I had found them I would have besought Clare to come back. She was with me nearly all the time, this dreadful woman. I kept sending her away, but half an hour later there she was again. She brought her child with her, wrapped in a shawl. She said she felt like drowning it,—a shocking thing to hear a woman say. Saxon fair it was, and I believed her when she told me Lovel had nothing to do with it. She has been with me almost uninterruptedly now for three days; I kept her at Starvecrow because I didn’t want the story trumpeted over the whole village. Certain that she has gone with Lovel, indeed! Of course I am certain. Besides, I found the tracks of two persons’ feet in the snow—a man’s and a woman’s.”

“Well, why didn’t you follow those tracks?” asked Mr. Warrener, who had been staring at Calladine all through his recital.

"You may be sure I did, and they led me to the top of the Downs,—knee-deep in some places. Then snow began to fall again and the tracks were blotted out,—I lost them,—I fancied the Downs and the snow were conspiring against me with Clare and Lovel. Lovel's wife grew frantic when she saw the tracks blurring; she began running round and round in a senseless circle. There was I, up on the height with that common woman, she having lost her husband and I having lost my wife. That is what your daughter, sir, has exposed me to."

"Is that all you think about?" said Mr. Warrener.

"Heaven knows it isn't!" cried Calladine. "I think horrible things,—I think of Clare suffering from the cold, and then I think of her close with Lovel, and upon my soul I don't know whether to wish her dead or alive. You don't understand, Mr. Warrener, the passion they have for one another. I suppose I knew it, a long way back, but I shut my mind to it. It seemed preposterous. I put it away. And then, when it began to come closer, I did not know how to fight it,—I knew how strong it was. And Clare was like a little trapped thing all the while; gentle to me, but always looking out of the window. I tried to tame her; she pretended to be quite tame, but all the while she kept that poised look about her,—ready to spread her wings."



"You seem to have a good deal to say about it all," Mr. Warrener observed.

Calladine was silent; he felt rebuked.

"I have been crushing down my thoughts for three days," he muttered then, sulkily.

"But what are we to do?" said Mr. Warrener. He took out his big handkerchief and began to mop his forehead, then, remembering that the day was cold, he replaced it in his pocket. "Is it snowing now?" he asked irrelevantly.

"No," said Calladine. "It is bright and frosty, and there is no wind; the wind has dropped ever since the night that Clare went. I used to think the wind made her more restless, 'Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne,' you know, 'me rendra fou.'"

"But what are we to do?" said Mr. Warrener again. They were two helpless beings, to confront such a problem. "At all events, she is safe enough with young Lovel; I believe he is a capable sort of creature; he won't let her come to any harm."

"Curse him," said Calladine, resentful that the legend of Lovel's efficiency should have percolated even to Mr. Warrener's secluded room.

"We must go out and look for them," said Mr. Warrener. "Come, Calladine," he said, rousing himself, "you don't seem able to take any action. Bestir yourself; we must go out and look for them."

"Must we?" said Calladine without interest.

"But I don't think it's any good, you know. I have a superstitious feeling about it; there was something intangible about Clare. I never got hold of her,—she was my joy, she tinkled about my house, in and out of my rooms, but it was like having a linnet in a cage. You know how the men go out and snare the larks under nets on the Downs; well, it was like that. She didn't mope; no, never; but I think she was only waiting for the day when she should fly away."

"Nonsense, nonsense," said Mr. Warrener. "Don't encourage such ridiculous fancies, Richard."

"I've seen her," said Calladine, "looking out of the window, looking out of the window . . ."

"Come," said Mr. Warrener again; "if you won't come with me I must go alone."

"And the man too," said Calladine, obstinately; "he was always on the Downs; he wouldn't bind himself down to a master; he slipped free."

"Are you coming?" asked Mr. Warrener, standing up. He cast a glance at his writing-table. "Fancy Clare . . ." he said with a sigh. "She was a help to me, Calladine, you don't know. I made a sacrifice in giving her to you. But I thought it was for the child's happiness; and she hadn't a mother. I missed her more than anybody knew. You never realised how much she helped me; why, look here . . ." and he showed Calladine a thick note-book filled with Clare's handwriting. "She had an instinct for

archæology," he said, "and she wrote a beautiful hand—clear and pretty both."

"You make it sound like an epitaph," said Calladine bitterly.

"Heaven forbid," said Mr. Warrener, a little startled. "She's safe enough, never you fear. All we have to do is to get her back and perhaps we'll find your fears were groundless,—a burst of wildness, only,—she was accustomed to liberty, you know,—perhaps it's no worse than that,—lovers, you said,—but oh, no, I can't believe . . ."

"You and I, Mr. Warrener," said Calladine, fixing the old man with a gaze full of meaning, "have perhaps lived a little too remote from life. Clare is alive, Lovel is alive; you and I are left behind."

"But all the same . . ." said Mr. Warrener, greatly troubled, "all the same . . . Lovers, you said. Oh, no, surely not," and he looked embarrassed, uncomfortable, as at an indecency.

They went out together. They went on foot, with no very definite scheme of action in their minds. Vaguely they intended to make their way up on to the Downs, on to the topmost height if possible, and from there to scan the rolling country. They went side by side, Calladine long and spare, Mr. Warrener, round, short and bespectacled, and as they went they tried to disguise their anxiety from one another, and to pretend that they had gone out for no more

serious purpose than to recall a troublesome child from an escapade. But there were periods of silence between them, broken with a jerk by Mr. Warrener with brisk questions, "Now in what direction did she ride for choice, Calladine?" or "If the fellow is a shepherd, he must have a hut up on these hills." "Yes, I have visited that: it was empty," said Calladine, forced into a morose reply.

They took the road out of the village, the only road cleared by the snow-plough, and presently struck up into the hills, climbing with caution, for they were afraid of sinking suddenly into a drift against a bank. They climbed, prodding with long sticks before them, a long wearisome climb, their feet sinking over the ankle at every step into the soft snow; by now they had the excuse for speaking very little, for their energies went all on their progress. "I have spent my time like this for the last three days," said Calladine, grimly.

It was noteworthy that neither of them considered for a moment that Clare and Lovel might have moved on to another part of the country; they took it for granted that they had remained among the Downs.

No paths were to be seen anywhere, only the rolling white hills, broken by the sky-line beech-clumps. No sound; neither the tinkling of water, nor the quivering of larks, nor the quaver of sheep, nor even the wind; only the hush of quiet snow lying spread. It was a stillness that

grew as they climbed; a stillness, a shroud. There was the glitter of the snow, and the black clubbed trees, and the white sky, and the silence.

It occurred to them that they might get lost, for all the hills looked much the same, and the landmarks were all covered up; the White Horse, the Grey Wethers. Still, Calladine was contemptuous of that; and as for Mr. Warrener, he plodded on with an unrepining, pathetic obstinacy.

At last they came to the top, and stood on White Horse Hill, two puny figures scanning the horizon. "There is Lovel's hut," said Calladine, pointing it out. "We had better go down to it," said Mr. Warrener, and they began the descent, which was almost as trying as their climb, for they had to hold themselves back, the snow being blown into deeper drifts on that side of the hill.

The great scoops in the flank of the hill forced them to follow a circular route which lengthened their road. The hut seemed to stand always equally far ahead, and never to draw any nearer; nor had they much hope of finding either Clare or Lovel within it. Mr. Warrener, now that he had gained a few hours of experience, was beginning to share Calladine's hopelessness; before they started, it had seemed comparatively simple an undertaking to go out and search and shout for Clare over the Downs. Now, although he called her name tentatively on approaching the hut, the quilted silence swallowed up the small

echo of his voice. Yet it was a bell-like name to call, "Clare! Clare!"

Calladine let Mr. Warrener go forward and peer into the hut, and he felt a sudden tenderness for the old man. "If," he said to himself, "Clare should never return to me, Mr. Warrener and I must keep house together," but the idea of Clare not returning gave him a pang which eclipsed the amenities of the prospect with Mr. Warrener, leading a scholar's life, and he was ashamed of the glimpse that had opened out on to a life so congenial, so secure.

Mr. Warrener turned in the doorway and beckoned.

"They have been here," he said.

Calladine drew near and looked. Yes, they had been there. The hut was poor, a shepherd's shelter, with a rough table arranged on a couple of boxes, and a thick pallet of bracken on the floor; warm enough, no doubt, and even snug, with the paraffin lamp burning and the door closed against the cold. Mr. Warrener and Calladine looked in silence. A horn mug stood on the table, beside a loaf of bread; two sugar-boxes served as stools. A couple of blankets were thrown over the bracken; a bag stuffed with bracken did for a pillow. There was nothing else.

"My God," said Calladine, staring at the pallet, "they lay there last night,—they lay there!" He looked round the pitiful cabin, and a groan was forced from him. "He brought her here!"



he said, "and I who gave her everything she could desire,—comfort, even beauty, refinement . . ." He sat down and buried his face, and touched perhaps the bitterest moment he had yet gone through. "How much she must have loved him," he said, raising a suddenly haggard face to Mr. Warrener.

Mr. Warrener was deeply perturbed and distressed. Such things were altogether beyond his experience and understanding.

"Hush,—don't take it so much to heart," he said, confused, but meaning to be kind, and he touched Calladine on the shoulder with a gesture singularly awkward. "Now let us think what is to be done. Shall we remain here, and trust to their return at nightfall? It is true that we could not, all four of us, spend the night in this hut, but probably Lovel knows the way,—he can take us all home safely."

"You seem to have a curious confidence in the fellow," growled Calladine.

Mr. Warrener blinked in his mild fashion.

"Yes,—I don't quite know why," he said, "except that I've seen him about the village,—he seemed an alert, romantic kind of creature.—Forgive me, I see that pains you."

"Oh, not at all," said Calladine, ironical.

"We must wait,—there is nothing else to be done," said Mr. Warrener, reluctantly.

"No," said Calladine, rousing himself to a sudden determination, "I will wait, but you, Mr. Warrener, must make your way home while day-

light lasts. You will only have to follow our own tracks in the snow. Indeed, I should prefer it," he said, seeing the old man hesitate, and gently he took Mr. Warrener by the arm and urged him out of the hut. A hard cruel sun was already setting red behind a clump of beeches. The white sky became suffused with crimson in the west; on the rounded tops of the hills the snow flushed to pink. But it was a hard, cruel world that they saw, the hard red of the snow where the sunset did not catch it. The line of the beech-clump curved already across the slowly sinking sun, and presently hid it altogether from sight; the tops of the hills lost their flush, and only a few red bars lingered still in the sky.

"What a desolate spot!" exclaimed Mr. Warrener, impressed, "and what a spot," he went on, "for a shepherd to study the courses of the stars, for such has been the tradition of shepherds since the days when the known world was not one tithe of the size we now learn it to be. Think of that, Calladine," said the old man, warming to his subject, "those early shepherds on the hills were more conversant with the cycle of the heavenly bodies than with the distribution of their own planet. A fine tradition among shepherds—for what else have they to do? They don't read in books, but they read in the heavens through the long, lonely nights; and observe, Calladine, that in winter, when the pleasures of the earth are less, the heavens in compensation

treble their magnificence. I don't believe that a man who spends his nights alone in the open remains similar to other men. He's soaked in the sense of space; and young Lovel . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Calladine impatiently, "but there is no time to be lost if you are to reach King's Avon before dark. Follow our tracks; there are no other tracks to confuse you, for it snowed a little this morning; indeed, there is still snow about in the air."

"I don't like to leave you alone in this lonely place," said Mr. Warrener, still hesitating.

"Doubtless Clare and Lovel found no fault with its loneliness last night," Calladine replied harshly.

"My dear Richard," said Mr. Warrener, vexed at his son-in-law's harping on this theme, "I am sure you distress yourself unnecessarily. Clare will be able to reassure you,—and she is a very truthful child," he added, with a certain pleading pathos, as though to justify his up-bringing of her.

"Where, then, did the man sleep?" said Calladine, turning on him. "Supposing he gave Clare the pallet, where did he pass the night himself? Tell me that."

"Why, I don't know,—sitting up, I suppose,—he could lean his back against the wall," replied Mr. Warrener.

Finally he consented to go, and set off, Calladine watching him until after trudging up the hill he topped its crest and was lost to sight.

Calladine then, a prey to such loneliness as he had never dreamt, returned into the hut to wait. Twilight came, the long, cold, late-winter twilight when the world seems dead. The last vestiges of colour faded out of the west. Such sharp shadows as there had been, merged into a greyer, universal shadow; the hard black and the hard white turned to grey, vast and mournful; the sky was all grey now, and the dusk heavy with impending snow. The quietness and the poverty of the hut settled down round Calladine. He had examined its few poor resources, fingering the utensils he found in the little cupboard on the wall, the tea-pot, the canister of tea and sugar, the rasher of bacon put ready on a plate; but now he sat listless, with hanging hands, and not so much as a sound came to make him raise his head. He did not know how long he sat there. The darkness deepened; soon the black night was again over the Downs, vaulted; the big golden stars, and the dim huge shapes of the hills. He was without sensation, numb, having the consciousness only of his extreme solitude. So numb was he, that he was scarcely aware what he waited for. He simply sat on, in complete darkness now, feeling neither hunger nor cold, forgetful almost of his sorrow, patient only like a man condemned to an indefinite suspense.

When he heard the sound of a voice singing out on the hill, he raised his head and waited. The voice drew nearer, singing a cheerful song;

it trilled and carolled, as in an exuberant light-heartedness. To Calladine it came with a strange effect, this voice singing out in the night, unexplained, bearing down upon the hut, frivolous and rollicking. Suddenly it sounded quite close, outside. The door was torn open, a figure carrying a lantern appeared on the threshold, and Calladine beheld the grinning face and battered hat of Olver Lovel.

The boy carried parcels in his arms, besides the lantern swinging from his wrist. He appeared in excellent spirits, grinning broadly, skipping as he stood on the threshold of the door, with little excited skips from foot to foot. He seemed scarcely able to contain his high spirits and his excitement. When he saw that the hut was already occupied, he gaped stupidly, then burst into peals of laughter. Calladine, remaining seated, looked at him without a word. He perceived nothing startling in the advent of this apparition, apathetic as he was, and at the same time strung up to the most improbable occurrences. It seemed to him quite natural that Olver should stand shouting with laughter in the doorway; he saw nothing grotesque in the encounter of himself with the crazy boy out in this hut on the hills. Clare!—this was the note to which Clare had re-tuned his life.

“Mr. Calladine!” said Olver, ceasing from his laughter. He came forward and put his parcels and his lantern down on the table. Its rays illuminated the little hut. “So you were wait-

ing for them, sitting here in the dark, were you?" he observed.

"Will they come?" asked Calladine.

"Oh yes, they'll come," replied Olver easily. "But they won't let you stop here, you know," he added. "No, nor me either," he pursued, coming closer to Calladine and speaking confidentially. "They'll put us both out into the snow, get-yourselves-home-as-best-you-can. They won't care. They won't notice us, scarcely. They're in a dream. Nod to me, perhaps; give me a pat, like a dog. Good Olver; he brings our food. But do they eat it? they seem like they don't need food."

"Have you seen them, then?" said Calladine.

"Seen them? Lord bless you, yes; and seen you too, wandering round with Daisy. I was behind you, many and many a time, but you didn't turn."

He began now to unpack his parcels, bringing out a loaf of bread, a tin of milk, some eggs, and finally some raw meat in slices. Calladine watched him in silence. He disposed of everything in a business-like manner, fetching two plates out of the cupboard, laying the table, putting ready the tea-pot and the canister.

"You might well have lit the lamp for them," he said reproachfully to Calladine.

He lit the little paraffin lamp himself, and the hut was further irradiated by its yellow glow. The hut made now a patch of warmth and light



among the cold, dark hills; a box of light, like a star in the blackness of space. Calladine felt the warmth creep through him, as though he were admitted to a hint of the sufficient and radiant secret of those lovers. The poverty of the shelter disappeared now, in the golden warmth of the light from within. And he felt that he, and not they, was the pauper.

Olver meanwhile had set the meat to fry over the lamp. It frizzled as he turned it with a fork, and he crouched over it, humming his song. "You seem very well contented," said Calladine.

Olver looked up, having forgotten Calladine's presence.

"I am contented, because Nicholas is happy," he replied.

"Simple enough!" said Calladine.

"But she is happy too," said Olver, sitting back on his heels and staring at Calladine.

"He is only a mad boy," thought Calladine to himself.

Olver sang. He sang an old song, of a girl drowned in the mill-pool because she had lost her lover. The wistful beat of the ballad came back at the end of each verse; it droned on, with mournful persistence. At last Calladine could bear its monotony no longer, and asked, "When will they come?"

Olver shrugged. "Who can tell?"

"Where are they?" Calladine asked.

Olver shrugged again. "Who can tell?"

Calladine remembered how often he had asked Clare, "Where have you been? where have you been?"

He remembered that her answers had never left him any the wiser; he had never come near to what he really wanted to know.

What was it, indeed, that he had really wanted to know? the whole secret of her being, to be explained in a dozen words?

He said to Olver, "It is night, it is cold; have they lost their way out on the hills?"

Olver laughed at him. "Lost? They?"

"They are only human!" cried Calladine, afraid. He got up and stood over Olver. "Tell me, they are human, aren't they?"

Olver laughed again.

Calladine went to the door. He opened it and looked out; the cold met him, and the stars in the blackness. "Clare!" he cried. "Clare!"

"I am going mad," he said to himself. "I am going out of my mind."

Looking back into the hut, he saw Olver still on his knees on the floor, prodding at the meat over the lamp. He went back, bent down, and cried close to Olver's ear, "What are we doing here? they are keeping us waiting."

"We don't count," replied Olver indifferently.

He began his song again. He had taken his mirror from his pocket, and was squinting into it, at the reflection of the hut; on each beat of the measure, he nodded down towards it.

“Her hair was tangled in the reeds,  
Her hair so gold and gay,”

he sang.

“Would you like to look into my mirror?” he asked Calladine.

An idea took him; he scrambled to his feet.

“They’re all afraid of my mirror,” he said. “*She* wouldn’t look into it, for fear of what she might see there. But you shall look. Look into it now, and you’ll see them; you shall see them as they were in here, last night.”

Calladine pushed him away; made him stagger against the wall of the hut.

“You would see them! you would see them!” cried Olver, delighted.

Neither of them noticed that the door had opened, and that Lovel stood in the hut.

“Nicco!” cried Olver.

Calladine wheeled round. Clare came into the hut, and her face shone out like Lovel’s, both golden in the light, both arrested in the midst of their carelessness.

Lovel spoke to Calladine.

“This was the only place we had,” he said, “couldn’t you leave it to us?”

Clare looked at Calladine; her face wore that oblique, fugitive look which he had known, and loved, and dreaded.

She turned to Lovel, and they swayed towards one another as though something drew them.

“We had better go,” she said, inviting him.

"Yes," he replied, drifting idly on the stream of her will, of their common will, one with her.

She gave him her hand, and in the gold light they hung briefly, transient creatures of eternal flight. The curtain of night and stars stretched behind them, in the rectangle of the open door.

"The scenery is set!" cried Calladine hysterically, pointing with his hand.

The rays of the lantern streamed out towards the snow, gilding a path up the whiteness, quickly lost into the dark.

"They need no shelter," cried Calladine.

The hills were outside, waiting, and the stars, silent.

"Why linger?" cried Calladine to Clare and Lovel.

They faded into the night, noiseless and swift. Calladine ran out of the hut, he ran up and down, he cried "Clare! Clare!" and the hills answered him. He came back into the hut, where Olver, dancing, held the mirror up to his eyes. "Look! and you shall see them." He dashed the mirror out of Olver's hand; it smashed upon the ground. "You will never see them again, now," cried Olver, "you will never see them again."

THE END









